

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

A founding member of the Robert W. Woodruff Arts Center

ROBERT SPANO, Music Director

DONALD RUNNICLES, Principal Guest Conductor

DELTA CLASSICAL SERIES CONCERTS

Thursday, Friday and Saturday, October 22, 23 and 24, 2009, at 8 p.m.

DONALD RUNNICLES, Conductor
JAMES EHNES, Violin

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Overture, Opus 21 (1826)

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD (1897-1957)

Violin Concerto in D Major, Opus 35 (1945)

I. *Moderato nobile*

II. *Romance: Andante*

III. *Finale: Allegro assai vivace*

JAMES EHNES, Violin

INTERMISSION

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)

Also sprach Zarathustra, Opus 30 (1896)

“INSIDE THE MUSIC” preview of the concert, Thursday at 7 p.m.,
presented by Ken Meltzer, ASO Insider and Program Annotator.

The use of cameras or recording devices during the concert is strictly prohibited.

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

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This performance is being recorded for broadcast at a later time.

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Ken Meltzer

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Overture, Opus 21 (1826)

FELIX MENDELSSOHN was born in Hamburg, Germany, on February 3, 1809, and died in Leipzig, Germany, on November 4, 1847. The first performance of the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* took place at Stettin (now, Szczecin, Poland), on February 20, 1827, with Carl Loewe conducting. The Overture is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, tuba, timpani and strings. Approximate performance time is twelve minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performance: December 18, 1948, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances:

March 19, 20 and 21, 1998, Yoel Levi, Conductor.

In the span of less than one year, the teenaged Felix Mendelssohn composed two masterpieces. In October of 1825, Mendelssohn completed his Octet for Strings, Opus 20. In July of the following year, Mendelssohn informed his sister Fanny: "I have grown accustomed to composing in our garden; there I completed two piano pieces in A major and E minor. Today or tomorrow I am going to dream there the *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This is, however, an enormous audacity." A few days later, after hearing the Berlin premiere of Carl Maria von Weber's Overture to his opera, *Oberon*, Mendelssohn wrote to his sister: "Ever since you left, my love for you goes in E minor."

By the time of these letters, Mendelssohn had begun the composition of his Overture to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (whose opening theme is indeed in the key of E minor). Aided by the guidance and constructive criticism of his friend, composer Adolph Bernhard Marx, the 17-year-old Mendelssohn completed his Overture on August 6, 1826. After a few private performances of the work, both in versions for piano duet and orchestra, the official premiere of the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* took place at a concert in Stettin on February 20, 1827, led by composer and conductor Carl Loewe. That concert also featured the northern European premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in which Mendelssohn joined the orchestra as a violinist.

From its very first performance, the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* captivated its audience. Robert Schumann observed: "The bloom of youth lies over it ... It is an inspired moment when the mature master took his first and loftiest flight." Several years later, Mendelssohn was able to recapture the magic of his early masterpiece when he composed numerous additional pieces to serve as incidental music for an October 14, 1843 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Neues Palais in Potsdam. Mendelssohn's Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (including of course, the Overture) remains one of the finest works in this genre. As one British musicologist observed: "With *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we cannot think of Shakespeare without Mendelssohn or Mendelssohn without Shakespeare."

Musical Analysis

The Overture begins with four hushed ascending chords. A gossamer string figure leads to a grand outburst by the orchestra. After a brief passage by the winds, the strings introduce a lovely descending melody. The exposition features other material relating to the action of Shakespeare's play, including a rustic dance and a braying figure associated with Bottom's transformation into a donkey. The opening string figure serves as the basis for the quicksilver development section. The four ascending chords return to introduce the recapitulation of the principal thematic material. The coda offers its own magic. A cadence appears to mark the Overture's conclusion, but is followed instead by the final reprise of the opening string figure. The four ascending chords cap the peaceful closing measures. As Mendelssohn described: "At the end, after everything has been satisfactorily settled and the principal players have joyfully left the stage, the elves follow them, bless the house and disappear with the dawn. So the play ends, and my Overture too."

Violin Concerto in D Major, Opus 35 (1945)

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD was born in Brno (now the Czech Republic), on May 29, 1897, and died in Hollywood, California, on November 29, 1957. The first performance of the Violin Concerto took place in St. Louis, Missouri, on February 15, 1947, with Jascha Heifetz as soloist, and Vladimir Golschmann conducting the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. In addition to the solo violin, the Concerto is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani, bass drum, cymbal, gong, vibraphone, xylophone, glockenspiel, chimes in F, harp, celesta and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-three minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: September 16, 17 and 18, 1999, Gil Shaham, Violin, Yoel Levi, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: April 2, 3 and 4, 2004, Chantal Juillet, Violin, Roberto Minczuk, Conductor.

"A genius ... a genius!"

In June of 1906, the eminent Viennese music critic, Julius Korngold, paid a visit to the home of Gustav Mahler. Korngold introduced his nine-year-old son, Erich Wolfgang. The young Korngold played his cantata, *Gold*, from memory while Mahler followed the score. Gustav Mahler was unable to contain his enthusiasm. He walked about the room, all the while repeating the words, "A genius ... a genius!" At Mahler's recommendation, young Erich studied with composer Alexander von Zemlinsky from 1909-1911.

Mahler was far from alone in his glowing assessment of Erich Wolfgang Korngold's prodigious musical talent. The eminent conductor, Felix Weingartner, remarked: "It seems that nature amassed all its gifts in music and laid them in the cradle of this extraordinary child." Richard Strauss, upon hearing Korngold's *Schauspiel Ouvertüre* (1911) and *Sinfonietta* (1913), stated: "One's first reaction that these compositions are by an adolescent boy are those of awe and fear: this firmness of style,

this sovereignty of form, this individual expression, this harmonic structure — it is really amazing.” In fact, Erich Wolfgang Korngold’s early works were so accomplished that some accused Julius of composing them in his son’s name. Julius Korngold’s good-natured response was: “If I had such creative talents as a composer, I would not have devoted my life to being a mere critic.”

As a young man, Korngold enjoyed extraordinary success with several chamber, orchestra and operatic works. The greatest triumph of Korngold’s early years, however, occurred with the December 4, 1920 simultaneous premieres in Hamburg and Cologne of his opera *Die tote Stadt*. That work proved to be an international sensation, with subsequent performances by no fewer than eighty-three opera houses. Korngold later taught opera and composition at the Vienna Staatsakademie. The president of Austria named Korngold professor *honoris causa*.

In 1934, Korngold traveled to Hollywood to arrange a film score based upon Mendelssohn’s Incidental Music to William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Korngold’s fifth opera, *Die Kathrin*, was scheduled for its Vienna premiere in the spring of 1938; however, the Nazi Anschluss forced its cancellation. Korngold then relocated to the United States, returning to Hollywood. There, Korngold applied his prodigious talents to the cinema, composing numerous film scores, two of which — *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *Robin Hood* (1938) — received Academy Awards.

“Music conceived in the heart”

With the conclusion of World War II, Korngold was able to return his attentions to music for the concert hall. In 1945, Korngold completed his Violin Concerto, a work he had begun in the late 1930s. Korngold dedicated the score to Gustav Mahler’s widow, Alma Mahler-Werfel. The composer originally intended the work for the Polish virtuoso Bronislaw Huberman. However, it was the legendary Jascha Heifetz who premiered the Concerto with Vladimir Golschmann and the St. Louis Symphony on February 15, 1947.

To some extent, the Violin Concerto represents a synthesis of Korngold’s dual careers as a composer of film and concert music. Several of the Concerto’s principal melodies originally appeared in Korngold film scores. Korngold offered these thoughts on his Concerto:

I want a confirmation, an answer to a question of decisive importance to me: is there still a place and a chance for music with expression and feeling, with long melodic themes, formed and developed on the principals of the classic masters — music conceived in the heart, and not constructed on paper?

Both virtuosos and audiences have answered Korngold’s question in the affirmative. The Violin Concerto, featuring the melodic genius and late-Romantic style that made Korngold the sensation of both Vienna and Hollywood, has maintained a constant presence in the concert hall and recordings.

Musical Analysis

I. *Moderato nobile* — The soloist immediately plays the wide-ranging principal melody, derived from the score to *Another Dawn* (1937). After a virtuoso episode, the soloist introduces the

extended subsidiary theme, which originally appeared in the 1939 film *Juarez*. While the soloist dominates the development section, it is the orchestra that inaugurates the recapitulation of the principal themes. The soloist soon returns to center stage, however, particularly in the thrilling coda that serves to conclude the opening movement.

II. *Romance: Andante* — The *Romance* opens with a brief, evocative orchestral introduction featuring a magical combination of vibraphone, harp and celesta. The soloist enters with the principal theme of the *Romance*, derived from the score to *Anthony Adverse* (1936). A central *misterioso* episode follows, leading to a reprise of the main theme and the melancholy closing bars.

III. *Finale: Allegro assai vivace* — After an orchestral outburst, the soloist plays the sprightly main theme, introduced in the film *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937). The theme undergoes several captivating transformations during the spirited *finale*, leading to the Concerto's thrilling final bars.

Also sprach Zarathustra, Opus 30 (1896)

RICHARD STRAUSS was born in Munich, Germany, on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, on September 8, 1949. The first performance of *Also sprach Zarathustra* took place in Frankfurt, Germany, on November 27, 1896, with the composer conducting the Museums-Orchester of Frankfurt-am-Main. *Also sprach Zarathustra* is scored for two piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two tubas, timpani, two harps, organ, bass drum, chimes in E, cymbals, triangle and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-two minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: February 15 and 16, 1971, Maurice Abravanel, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: November 9, 10 and 11, 2006, Jun Märkl, Conductor.

During the years 1895-97, Richard Strauss composed three orchestral tone poems based upon famous literary characters. The first, *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* (1895), is a rollicking tour-de-force depicting the exploits of the medieval jester. The last, *Don Quixote* (1897), is a witty and often affecting musical portrayal of the misadventures of Miguel de Cervantes's beloved "Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance." Strauss's inspiration for the middle work in this trilogy was of a far different nature — Friedrich Nietzsche's epic philosophic poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*) (1883-5).

Nietzsche's Zarathustra

The protagonist in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is based upon the ancient Persian prophet, also known as Zoroaster. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the prophet leaves the solitude of his mountain refuge to share his wisdom with mankind. During the course of the poem, Nietzsche, in the person of Zarathustra, denounces the very foundations of society

— organized religion, democracy and civilization — that he believes inhibit man’s ability to reach his greatest potential. As Zarathustra preaches:

“I teach you the overman (annotator’s note: the German word “übermensch” is sometimes translated as “superman.”) Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

“All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to the man? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. You have made your way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now, too, man is more ape than any ape ...

“Behold I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth.”

“My homage to the genius of Nietzsche”

Strauss was first drawn to Nietzsche’s masterwork during the composer’s preparations for his opera *Guntrum* (1894). He began composition of the score on February 4, 1896, and completed the work on August 24 of that year. The composer led the Museums-orchester of Frankfurt-am-Main in the November 27, 1896 premiere. Prior to the first performance, Strauss provided this brief program:

First movement: Sunrise, Man feels the power of God. *Andante religioso*. But man still longs. He plunges into passion (second movement) and finds no peace. He turns toward science, and tries in vain to solve life’s problem in a fugue (third movement). Then agreeable dance tunes sound and he becomes an individual, and his soul soars upward while the world sinks far below him.

Nietzsche, an ardent music-lover and amateur composer, once remarked to his friend, Peter Gast, of *Also sprach Zarathustra*: “I almost believe it belongs among the symphonies.” Gustav Mahler quoted a portion of *Zarathustra*’s text in his Third Symphony (1896) (ASO concerts of March 4 and 6, 2010), as did Frederick Delius in *A Mass of Life* (1905).

By contrast, Strauss’s *Also sprach Zarathustra* is a purely orchestral adaptation of Nietzsche’s work. From the time of the premiere, commentators have attempted to find a direct correlation between the music of *Also sprach Zarathustra* and the Nietzsche text that inspired it. Strauss understood the difficulty, perhaps even the futility, of attempting a musical depiction of Nietzsche’s philosophy. At the time of the tone poem’s December, 1896, Berlin premiere, Strauss confessed:

I did not intend to write philosophical music or portray Nietzsche’s great work musically. I meant rather to convey in music an idea of the evolution of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of development, religious as well as scientific, up to Nietzsche’s idea of the *Superman*. The whole symphonic poem is intended as my homage to the genius of Nietzsche, which found its greatest exemplification in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Musical Analysis

Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* opens with the famous “Sunrise” Introduction, followed by eight sections, performed without pause. Each has a title taken from a chapter in Nietzsche's book.

I. *Sunrise (Sonnenaufgang)* — Over string bass tremolos, reinforced by the contrabassoon, organ and bass drum, the trumpets play a three-note ascending theme. The orchestra responds with fanfares and thunderous timpani attacks. This episode is twice repeated, with the organ concluding the glorious final statement.

II. *Of the Backworldsman (Von den Hinterweltlern)* — Strauss originally entitled this section *Of the Divine (Von Göttlichen)*. Pizzicato cellos and basses introduce another ascending theme that will return throughout the work. Three horns intone a portion of the holy chant *Credo in unum Deum (I believe in one God)*. A lovely melody for divided strings builds to a climax and then subsides. An ascending viola passage serves as a bridge to the following section.

III. *Of the Great Longing (Von der grossen Sehnsucht)* — This brief episode presents transformations of the ascending theme from the previous section and the “Sunrise” motif. The organ plays the opening of the *Magnificat*, while the horns reprise the *Credo*. A furious rush of activity leads to the next section.

IV. *Of Joys and Passions (Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften)* — A brief, tempestuous passage that finally subsides in the closing measures.

V. *Song of the Grave (Das Grablied)* — Echoes of the previous section combine with the “Sunrise” motif and the “Longing” theme.

VI. *Of Science (Von der Wissenschaft)* — The cellos and basses quietly inaugurate an extended orchestral fugue based upon the “Sunrise” motif. The severity of this episode is briefly interrupted before an agitated passage signals the fugue's return in the following section.

VII. *The Convalescent (Der Genesende)* — The fugue subject is now violently transformed and the tension mounts until the orchestra erupts with a massive C-Major chord. After a brief pause, there is a slow, mysterious interlude. Suddenly, there is a flurry of activity. Brass fanfares punctuate swirling wind and string figures. The solo cello offers hints of a dance figure.

VIII. *The Dance Song (Das Tanzlied)* — This section presents a waltz in the best Viennese manner, prominently featuring the solo violin. The music grows to a voluptuous climax.

IX. *Night Wanderer's Song (Nachtwandlerlied)* — For the final episode, Strauss retained the original title of the parallel chapter in the book (Nietzsche ultimately changed it to *The Drunken Song*). The finale opens with a relentless tolling of the bell. The mood calms, leading to the lyrical final section. The closing bars present an eerie juxtaposition of the key of B in the higher-pitched instruments with the key of C in the double-basses, whose trio of pizzicato notes conclude Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

DONALD RUNNICLES, Conductor

Principal Guest Conductor Donald Runnicles is currently in his ninth year of the Creative Partnership with Music Director Robert Spano and President and CEO Allison Vulgamore. One of today's most consistently acclaimed conductors of opera and symphonic repertoire, Mr. Runnicles recently became General Music Director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Chief Conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra. Mr. Runnicles was Music Director and Principal Conductor of the San Francisco Opera, and is Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival.

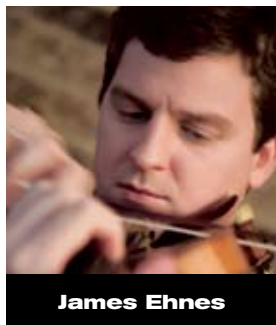


Mr. Runnicles's acclaimed recordings with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra include a concert disc with soprano Christine Brewer singing Strauss and Wagner and a new Strauss disc recorded live in Symphony Hall. With the ASO, Mr. Runnicles also has recorded the Mozart *Requiem*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and a Britten album. In the 2009-10 season, Mr. Runnicles and the ASO Chorus have accepted a third invitation to return to the Berlin Philharmonic, Dec. 17–19, 2009, to perform Brahms's *German Requiem*. The work will be sung in German. Prior to this, Mr. Runnicles and the ASO Chorus will perform the work with the ASO at Atlanta Symphony Hall, October 29 and 30, 2009.

Mr. Runnicles has ongoing musical relationships with today's finest orchestras and opera companies. Among the more than 60 productions he has conducted at San Francisco Opera was the 2005 world premiere of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*. He also enjoys accompanying singers at the piano and playing chamber music.

JAMES EHNES, Violin

Hailed as "the Jascha Heifetz of our day" (Toronto Globe and Mail), violinist James Ehnes is widely considered one of the most dynamic and exciting performers in classical music. He has performed in over 30 countries on five continents, appearing with many of the world's most well-known orchestras and conductors, including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Andrew Davis, Charles Dutoit, Ivan Fischer, Lorin Maazel, Michael Gielen, Hans Graf, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, the late Richard Hickox, Paavo Järvi, Andrew Litton, Zdenek Macal, Sir Charles Mackerras, David Robertson, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Christian Thielemann, Bramwell Tovey and Bobby McFerrin.



Following a busy summer featuring appearances in Chicago, Toronto, Ottawa, Seattle, the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles and his debut at the Salzburg Festival, the 2009-10 season takes James Ehnes to Japan, the Netherlands, the U.S., Canada and Germany. In Europe, James

will be featured in concerts with the BBC Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony, London Philharmonia, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Netherlands Philharmonic. In the U.S., he will be seen in concerts with the Baltimore, St. Louis, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Seattle, Columbus, Houston, Dallas and San Francisco symphony orchestras and return to the San Diego Mostly Mozart Festival.

In addition to his many concert appearances, James will appear in recital in Detroit, Toronto, Vancouver, Brandon, Montreal and Glasgow. Future seasons see James return to Australia, New Zealand and Japan in addition to many performances throughout Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

An extremely prolific and multi-award-winning recording artist, James Ehnes has received a Grammy, a Gramophone and six Juno Awards and will add to his impressive discography of over 20 recordings with a new recording of the 24 Paganini *Caprices* (ONYX) due to be released in fall 2009. James's first recorded the Paganini *Caprices* in 1995 for Telarc. His Juno Award-winning release of *Homage*, a CD/DVD set featuring performances on 12 of the greatest violins and violas ever made, all belonging to the extraordinary Fulton Collection continues to garner exceptional reviews.

Other recent releases include Elgar's Violin Concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis on the Onyx label and a disc of works by Paul Schoenfield with pianist Andrew Russo (Black Box). James's CD featuring the violin concertos of Korngold, Walton and Barber with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Bramwell Tovey conducting (CBC) was widely considered a highlight of 2006 and won the 2008 Grammy and Juno Awards.

In January 2006, he celebrated the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth with the release of a recording of Mozart's complete oeuvre for solo violin and orchestra. The five Violin Concertos and three single movement works — Adagio K. 261, Rondo K. 269 and Rondo K. 373 — feature an ensemble of extraordinary musicians which Ehnes gathered from around the world and directed himself (CBC Records) and has widely received top praise making it "a clear first choice in the field" (Classic FM).

James Ehnes has recorded repertoire ranging from Bach Violin Sonatas to John Adams *Road Movies*. His CBC recordings with l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal of Max Bruch's Concertos nos. 1 and 3 (with Charles Dutoit) and Concerto No. 2 with the *Scottish Fantasy* (with Mario Bernardi) won back-to-back Juno awards in 2001 and 2002 for Best Classical Recording. In January 2002, he was named Young Artist of the Year at the Cannes Classical Awards for his *Six Sonatas & Partitas* for Solo Violin by Bach (Analekta), which was also awarded a Juno award in 2001.