Concert of Sunday, May 12, 2019, at 3:00p

Stephen Mulligan, Conductor

Lexine Feng, cello

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in E minor, Opus 85 (1919)

IV. Allegro; Moderato; Allegro, ma non troppo

Lexine Feng, cello

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 1 in D Major (“Titan”) (1888)

I. Langsam. Schleppend. (“Wie ein Naturlaut”)—Im Anfang sehr gemächlich

II. Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell—Trio. Recht gemächlich

III. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen

IV. Stürmisch bewegt
Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in E minor, Opus 85 (1919), Fourth Movement

Edward Elgar was born in Broadheath, near Worcester, England, on June 2, 1857, and died in Worcester on February 23, 1934. The first performance of the Cello Concerto took place at the Queen’s Hall in London, England, on October 27, 1919, with Felix Salmond as soloist, and the composer conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. In addition to the solo cello, the Concerto is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, and strings. Approximate performance time of the fourth movement is eleven minutes.

In the spring of 1918, following a long and painful illness finally diagnosed as tonsillitis, Edward Elgar underwent surgery. The composer's daughter, Carice, recalled: “He was in a great deal of pain for several days; (there) were not anything like the sedatives that we have now, but nevertheless he woke up one morning and asked for pencil and paper.” Elgar then composed the first music he had written in nine months—a beautiful melody in 9/8 time. That fall, Alice Elgar noted that her husband was at work orchestrating the melody.

By the spring of the following year, Elgar devoted much time and attention to this music, which now took form as his Cello Concerto in E minor. On June 26, 1919, Elgar wrote to his friend, Sidney Colvin: “I am frantically busy writing & have nearly completed a Concerto for Violoncello—a real large work & I think good & alive.” Elgar later dedicated the Concerto to Sidney Colvin and his wife, Frances.

Cellist Felix Salmond assisted Elgar in the composition of the solo part. In August, Elgar offered Salmond the opportunity to be the soloist in the Concerto’s world premiere, which took place at the Queen’s Hall in London on October 27, 1919. It was the opening of the London Symphony Orchestra’s first concert season following World War I. Albert Coates, the Orchestra’s new conductor, was scheduled to lead music by Wagner, Scriabin, and Borodin. Elgar would take the podium for the premiere of his Cello Concerto. Coates decided to devote virtually all of the allotted rehearsal time to the music he was conducting. As a result, the Concerto received a woefully inadequate performance.

In a review of the premiere of the Elgar Cello Concerto, the eminent British music critic, Ernest Newman, wrote: “never, in all probability, has so great an orchestra made so lamentable a public exhibition of itself.” Still, Newman was able to discern the considerable qualities of Elgar’s newest composition: “The work itself is lovely stuff, very simple—that pregnant simplicity that has come upon Elgar’s music in the last couple of years—but with a profound wisdom and beauty underlying its simplicity…the realization in tone of a fine spirit’s lifelong wistful brooding upon the loveliness of the earth.”
In time, the Elgar Concerto has become recognized as one of the 20th century’s finest works for cello and orchestra. Many commentators have recognized the Concerto’s “profound wisdom,” first cited by Ernest Newman. However, they often attribute that wisdom to far less genial circumstances than those suggested by Newman. Elgar composed the Cello Concerto after the devastation of the First World War. Elgar was all too aware of the effect the “War to End All Wars” had upon the world he knew and loved. As the composer wrote in 1917: “Everything good & nice & clean & sweet is far away—never to return.”

And perhaps Elgar sensed that his own life—at least as a composer—was reaching its final stages. In his catalogue of works, Elgar wrote the following next to the listing of his Cello Concerto: “FINIS R.I.P.” And after his beloved Alice’s death in 1920, Elgar was never the same. Although Edward Elgar lived another fifteen years after the premiere of the Cello Concerto, it proved to be his last major work.

The Concerto is in four movements. In the finale (Allegro; Moderato; Allegro, ma non troppo), the music’s lively gait slows for a lengthy episode of extraordinary introspection and pathos. Echoes of the preceding Adagio add to the mood of resignation, as the music seems to fade to a silent conclusion. Suddenly, a reprise of the Concerto’s formidable opening measures, followed by a brief restatement of the principal theme, leads to the terse resolution.

**Symphony No. 1 in D Major, “Titan” (1888, Rev. 1893-6)**

Gustav Mahler was born in Kaliště, Bohemia, on July 7, 1860, and died in Vienna, Austria, on May 18, 1911. The first performance of the Symphony No. 1 took place in Budapest, Hungary, on November 20, 1889, with the composer conducting the Budapest Philharmonic. The “Titan” Symphony is scored for three piccolos, four flutes, four oboes, English horn, two E-flat clarinets, four clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, seven horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani (two players), bass drum, bass drum with attached cymbal, cymbals, gong, suspended cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, harp, and strings. Approximate performance time is fifty-three minutes.

Toward the close of March of 1888, Gustav Mahler informed his parents of the completion of his First Symphony: “There! I have today finished my work and can say thank God that it has turned out well. I hope that I have taken a big step forward with it.” The first performance took place on November 20, 1889, with the composer leading the Budapest Philharmonic.

For the premiere, Mahler designated the work not as a symphony, but as a “Symphonic Poem in Two Parts.” In January of 1893, Mahler revised his “Symphonic Poem,” and now referred to it as a symphony. He added the nickname “Titan”—after a novel by Jean Paul—and also assigned titles to each of the Symphony’s movements.
My time will come,” Mahler predicted—and indeed, it has. Mahler’s Nine completed Symphonies have become staples of the orchestral repertoire. The “Titan” is perhaps the most popular, and certainly, the most accessible. Today’s audiences might then wonder what so perplexed (and even angered) those who attended the work’s premiere.

However, it is important to bear in mind that the first performance of the “Titan” took place only four years after the premiere of Johannes Brahms’s Fourth Symphony. Those accustomed to the mainstream German repertoire, exemplified by Brahms and his predecessors, may perhaps be excused for having failed to appreciate Mahler’s bold new symphonic language.

The “Titan” strives for an epic mode of expression. And the work’s abrupt shifts in emotion and tone can be disconcerting—for some, even frightening. As in the case of Beethoven’s First Symphony, Mahler’s “Titan,” while at times paying homage to the past, clearly points the way to the revolutionary path that would soon follow.

Mahler’s 1893 program for his “Titan” Symphony is reproduced below in italics and bold type.

**TITAN, A tone poem in the form of a symphony**

**First Part**

“From the days of youth,” flower, fruit and thorn pieces.

“Endless Spring” (Introduction and Allegro Comodo) (The introduction depicts the awakening of Nature from its long winter sleep.)

I. *Langsam. Schleppend.* (Slow, Dragging) (“Wie ein Naturlaut”) (“Like a Nature Sound”)—Im Anfang sehr gemächlich (In the beginning very leisurely)—The slow-tempo introduction presents the Symphony’s central motif, a descending fourth, as well as bird calls and distant fanfares. The cuckoo’s song develops into the principal melody of the opening movement, introduced by the lower strings, and based upon the second of Mahler’s 1885 *Songs of a Wayfarer*—“Ging heut’ morgen übers Feld” (“This morning I went through the field”).

“Under full sail” (Scherzo)

II. *Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell* (Forceful, animated, but not too fast)—*Trio. Recht gemächlich* (Restrained)—The second-movement scherzo is in the spirit of the ländler, a popular Austrian folk dance. After a raucous outburst, a brief passage for solo horn serves as a bridge to the genial *Trio* section. The ländler returns to conclude the movement.

**Second Part**
“Commedia humana” (“Human Comedy”)

“Stranded!” (A funeral march in Callot’s manner) For this movement, the following explanation will help: the basic inspiration for it was found by the author in a humorous engraving, well known to all Austrian children: “The Huntsman’s Funeral,” from an old book of fairy tales. The forest animals accompany the dead hunter’s coffin to the grave. Hares carry the banner, in front of them marches a group of Bohemian musicians, accompanied by singing cats, toads, crows, etc. Stags, deer, foxes, and other four-legged and feathered animals follow the procession in all kinds of farcical positions.

III. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen (Solemn and measured, but not dragging)—Over the insistent beat of the timpani, a solo muted bass softly chants a macabre variation of the children’s nursery song, “Frère Jacques” (“Are you sleeping, Brother John?”). A village band episode, and a quotation of Mahler’s beautiful song, “The Two Blue Eyes,” also play important roles.

The mood expressed is sometimes ironic and merry, sometimes gloomy and uncanny, then suddenly...

“Dall’Inferno” (“From the Inferno”) (Allegro furioso), follows, like the last despairing cry of a deeply wounded heart.

IV. Stürmisch bewegt (Stormy, animated)—In the extended finale, the conflict ultimately resolves to the Symphony’s glorious D-Major apotheosis.