

Concerts of Thursday, March 5, and Saturday, March 7, 2020, at 8:00p

Emmanuel Villaume, Conductor

Andrew von Oeyen, piano

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

***Siegfried Idyll* (1870)**

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in E-flat Major, S. 124 (1855)

I. Allegro maestoso. Tempo giusto

II. Quasi Adagio

III. Allegretto vivace

IV. Allegro marziale animato

Andrew von Oeyen, piano

Intermission

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Opus 78 (“Organ Symphony”) (1886)

I. Adagio; Allegro moderato. Poco adagio

II. Allegro moderato; Presto. Maestoso; Allegro

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Siegfried Idyll (1870)

Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, Germany, on May 22, 1813, and died in Venice, Italy, on February 13, 1883. The first performance of *Siegfried Idyll* took place at the Wagners' home in Tribschen, Switzerland, on December 25, 1870. *Siegfried Idyll* is scored for flute, oboe, two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, trumpet, and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-one minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performance: January 13, 1954, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: January 22, 24, and 25, 2015, Matthias Pintscher, Conductor.

In the summer of 1864, Richard Wagner began an affair with Cosima von Bülow—the daughter of Franz Liszt, and wife of conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow. Richard and Cosima's first child, Isolde, was born in 1865. Richard and Cosima later moved to a villa in Tribschen (Wagner spelled it "Tribschen"), at Lake Lucerne. Their second daughter, Eva, was born at Tribschen in 1867. The birth of Richard and Cosima's son, Siegfried, took place two years later.

After Hans von Bülow agreed to divorce Cosima, she and Wagner married on August 25, 1870. That November, Richard Wagner composed a special musical birthday gift for his wife, one that also served to commemorate the birth of Siegfried, whom the couple nicknamed "Fidi."

Cosima Wagner's birthday was December 24. The Wagners celebrated her birthday on Christmas. On Christmas morning, 1870, Richard Wagner presented his special gift to Cosima. In her diary, Cosima described the magical event:

I can give you no idea, my children, about this day, nor about my feelings. I shall only tell you quite barely what happened: As I awoke, my ear caught a sound, which swelled fuller and fuller; no longer could I imagine myself to be dreaming; music was sounding, and such music! When it died away, Richard came into my room with the children and offered me the score of the symphonic birthday poem. I was in tears, but so was all the rest of the household. Richard had arranged his orchestra on the staircase, and thus our *Tribschen* was consecrated forever...After lunch the orchestra came into our house downstairs, and now the *Idyll* was heard once again, to the profound emotion of us all.

Wagner originally entitled this work *Tribschener Idyll, with Fidi's Birdsong and Orange Sunrise, as a Symphonic Birthday Greeting from Richard to Cosima*. Wagner never intended this composition to be made public. Later however,

during a period of severe financial duress, Wagner agreed to the score's publication, with the title *Siegfried Idyll*.

In *Siegfried Idyll*, Wagner incorporates several melodic themes that also appear in his epic cycle of heroic operas, *The Ring of the Nibelung*. But in the *Siegfried Idyll*, the themes are part of an instrumental work of extraordinary introspection, tenderness, and beauty. As such, Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* provides another, and most valuable window to the artistry of one of opera's most revolutionary composers.

The *Idyll* opens with the first violins singing the work's lovely, principal theme, which also appears in the final act of *Siegfried*—the Ring's third music drama (all of Wagner's children were named after leading characters from his operas). The music becomes more ardent, finally yielding to a descending melody, played by the oboe, a quotation of the German lullaby, "Sleep, Little Child, Sleep." Soon, both the opening theme and lullaby are presented in tandem. Later, the woodwinds introduce yet another theme from *Siegfried's* final act. The music proceeds to a vigorous climax, and the solo horn plays a motif associated with the opera's hero. Other themes from *Siegfried* also make their appearance. After yet another climax, the lullaby and opening theme return, as the *Siegfried Idyll* reaches its ethereal conclusion.

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in E-flat Major, S. 124 (1855)

Franz Liszt was born in Raiding, Hungary, on October 22, 1811, and died in Bayreuth, Germany, on July 31, 1886. The first performance of the Piano Concerto No. 1 took place at the hall of the palace of the Grand Duke of Weimar, Germany, on February 17, 1855, with the composer as soloist, and Hector Berlioz conducting. In addition to the solo piano, the Concerto No. 1 is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, cymbals a2, and strings. Approximate performance time is nineteen minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performance: November 30, 1947, Despy Karlas, Piano, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: November 2 and 3, 2013, Stephen Hough, Piano, James Gaffigan, Conductor.

"A giant"

The Hungarian-born Franz Liszt was one of the music history's greatest and most charismatic virtuosos. As a child, Liszt displayed a remarkable keyboard talent he refined under the tutelage of the eminent Austrian teacher, pianist, and composer, Carl Czerny. By the age of 12, Liszt had already become an acclaimed concert pianist. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, that Ludwig van Beethoven, who had been Czerny's teacher, attended a Liszt recital in 1823 and after the concert, kissed the young boy on the forehead.

On March 9, 1831, Liszt was present at the Paris debut of the legendary Nicolò Paganini. The young Liszt was overwhelmed by the Italian violinist's extraordinary fusion of showmanship and technical prowess. Liszt vowed that he would replicate, and perhaps even exceed, Paganini's charismatic hold upon an audience. The following year, Liszt heard Frédéric Chopin for the first time, and realized that poetry could move the listener with a force that rivaled the most impressive displays of virtuoso pyrotechnics.

Liszt exerted an almost otherworldly control over his audiences, due in great part to his technical and interpretive mastery. It was not uncommon for members of the audience to faint during a Liszt recital. Many of those who remained conscious would rush to the stage and try to retrieve such souvenirs as Liszt's cigar stubs, gloves, and broken piano strings. These items took on an almost religious significance for his devoted followers.

Franz Liszt, the legendary virtuoso pianist and showman, sometimes overshadows his considerable achievements as a composer. Liszt's phenomenal technique and keen ear allowed him to create works that explored new vistas in keyboard sonorities. Sir Charles Hallé once attended a concert in which Hector Berlioz conducted the *March to the Scaffold* from his orchestral work, the *Fantastic Symphony*. Liszt then played his own transcription for solo piano of the same piece, "with an effect even surpassing that of the full orchestra, and creating an indescribable *furor*."

One of the great pioneers of the Romantic movement, Liszt advanced the concept of music as a form of programmatic expression and, in fact, invented the term "sinfonische Dichtung" ("symphonic poem"). He also demonstrated bold and revolutionary possibilities for traditional musical conventions and forms, as in the case of his Piano Concerto No. 1.

The Piano Concerto No. 1

Liszt may have begun sketches for his First Piano Concerto in the early 1830s. He worked on both the First and Second Concertos during the years 1839-40. However, Liszt's prolific career as a concert performer delayed completion of both works until 1849, by which time he had been appointed Kapellmeister of the Weimar Court. Liszt revised the Concertos in 1853 and orchestrated them with the aid his pupil, the composer Joachim Raff. The premiere of the First Piano Concerto took place on February 17, 1855, at the hall of the palace of the Grand Duke of Weimar, with Liszt as soloist. The conductor was French composer Hector Berlioz, whose works Liszt championed in Weimar. The score of the First Piano Concerto was published two years later.

Musical Analysis

Liszt's first Piano Concerto is cast in a single continuous movement that divides into four sections, each played without pause.

I. *Allegro maestoso. Tempo giusto*—The Concerto opens with the strings' emphatic, *fortissimo* statement of a motif, to which the winds and brass respond with a short fanfare. The soloist responds with a grand cadenza. The principal motif and fanfare return throughout the opening section, featuring numerous dazzling episodes for the soloist. This portion of the Concerto ends with the pianist's delicate, ascending flourish.

II. *Quasi Adagio*— Muted strings introduce an ascending and descending theme soon played by the soloist. The music becomes increasingly tempestuous and then calms. Winds, accompanied by the soloist's ethereal trills, play a serene melody that serves as a bridge to the following section.

III. *Allegretto vivace*—The scherzo portion of the Concerto (*Allegretto vivace*) is a gossamer dance in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, enhanced by the triangle's sparkling presence. The solo cadenza and ensuing *Allegro animato* feature a reprise of the opening section's principal motif, as well the wind melody from the *Quasi Adagio* portion.

IV. *Allegro marziale animato*—The theme that served to open the *Quasi Adagio* portion of the Concerto is now transformed into a sprightly march. The pianist, followed by the winds, restate the woodwind melody that preceded the scherzo portion of the Concerto. The music of the scherzo returns as well. The Concerto's initial motif makes a final appearance in the brilliant closing pages.

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Opus 78 (“Organ Symphony”) (1886)

Camille Saint-Saëns was born in Paris, France, on October 9, 1835, and died in Algiers, Algeria, on December 16, 1921. The first performance of the “Organ Symphony” took place at St. James’s Hall in London, England, on May 19, 1886, with the composer conducting the Royal Philharmonic Society. The “Organ” Symphony is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, piano (four-hands), organ, cymbals a2, suspended cymbal, triangle, bass drum, and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-six minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: November 29 and 30, and December 1, 1974, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: January 29, 31, and February 1, 2015, Jun Märkl, Conductor.

Camille Saint-Saëns composed his Third Symphony at the request of London's Royal Philharmonic Society. Saint-Saëns had been contemplating a new symphony for some time. A few months after the 1885 commission, the composer informed the Philharmonic that the work was:

well under way. It will be terrifying, I warn you...This imp of a symphony has gone up a half-tone; it didn't want to stay in B minor

and it is now in C minor. It will be a treat for me to conduct it. Will it be a treat, though, for the people who hear it? That is the question. It's you who asked for it. I wash my hands of the whole thing.

Two Great Pianists Meet

During the spring of 1886 while in Paris, Saint-Saëns had the opportunity to play excerpts on the piano of his new Symphony for Franz Liszt. Saint-Saëns was a teenager when he first met Liszt. A virtuoso keyboard artist in his own right, Saint-Saëns was mesmerized by Liszt's talents:

I already considered him to be a genius and had formed in advance an almost impossible conception of his pianism. Judge of my astonishment when I realized that he far exceeded even this expectation. The dreams of my youthful fancy were but prose beside the Dionysian poetry evoked by his supernatural fingers. It would be impossible to give any idea of what he was like to those who never heard him in full possession of his talent...Never again shall we see or hear anything like it.

For his part, Liszt hailed the young Saint-Saëns as the "world's greatest organist." Liszt and Saint-Saëns became great friends and champions of each other's works. Saint-Saëns, who venerated Liszt for "occupying himself...with the highest forms of composition," fashioned several symphonic poems that bear the older composer's influence. Liszt, in turn, remarked, "While I am composing, I often ask myself the question: 'Would this please Saint-Saëns?' The affirmative encourages me to carry on, despite the weariness of age and other lassitudes." Liszt died in Bayreuth on July 31, 1886, at the age of 74. The published score of the Saint-Saëns Third Symphony bears the dedication "à la Mémoire de Franz Liszt."

"All that I have to give"

The premiere of the Third Symphony took place in London's St. James's Hall on May 19, 1886. The evening was a great personal triumph for Saint-Saëns. The composer led the Royal Philharmonic Society in his new Symphony, and was also the soloist in his Fourth Piano Concerto.

The London audience's response to the Symphony was generally positive. After the concert, Saint-Saëns was given an audience with the Prince of Wales, later crowned King Edward VII. The January 9, 1887 Paris premiere, again conducted by Saint-Saëns, was yet another success. After the performance, as Saint-Saëns descended the podium, composer Charles Gounod proclaimed: "There goes the French Beethoven!"

The Saint-Saëns Third, with its stunning orchestration and ingenious thematic manipulation, is one of the most important French symphonies of the second half of the nineteenth century. Camille Saint-Saëns did not compose another

symphony during the final thirty-five years of his life. As he remarked: "I have given all that I have to give...What I have done I shall never do again."

Musical Analysis

The Third Symphony is divided into two principal sections, in order, as the composer stated, to avoid "interminable repetition." Still, the work "embraces in principle the four traditional movements, but the first, halted in its development, serves as the introduction to the *Adagio*, and the *Scherzo* is left by the same process to lead to the finale."

I. *Adagio; Allegro moderato. Poco adagio*—After a brief slow-tempo introduction (*Adagio*), the strings play a restless theme (*Allegro moderato*) that will appear in various guises throughout the work. As the strings repeat the sixteenth-note figure, the winds play an ascending motif derived from the introduction. It soon develops into the second principal theme. Toward the conclusion of the exposition, the violins introduce a flowing melody. The two principal themes are featured, often simultaneously, in the brief development section. After the recapitulation, the mood calms, and a series of pizzicato notes by the cellos and basses leads to the slow-tempo section of the Symphony's First Part (*Poco adagio*). The organ accompanies the violins, violas and cellos, as they play the *Adagio's* affecting principal melody. The strings play a pizzicato variant of the *Allegro's* opening theme, which in turn serves as accompaniment for the reprise of the principal *Adagio* melody. Part I concludes with, in the composer's words, "a Coda of mystical character."

II. *Allegro moderato; Presto. Maestoso; Allegro*—The opening portion of the final movement serves the function of the traditional scherzo. The recurring theme from the Symphony's opening *Allegro moderato* now serves as the basis for the principal scherzo motif, first presented as a dialogue between the strings and thundering timpani. The theme is also the source of a more playful woodwind figure. In program notes for the Symphony's world premiere, Saint-Saëns observes: "there enters a fantastic spirit that is frankly disclosed in the *Presto*. Here arpeggios and scales, swift as lightning, on the piano, are accompanied by the syncopated rhythm of the orchestra." There is a repeat of the *Allegro moderato* and *Presto* sections, but in the latter, a new, more somber theme appears. In his program notes, Saint-Saëns further comments:

After a vague reminiscence of the initial theme of the first movement, a *Maestoso* in C major announces the approaching triumph of the calm and lofty thought. The initial theme of the first movement, wholly transformed, is now presented by divided strings and the pianoforte (four hands), and repeated by the organ with the full strength of the orchestra. (Annotator's note: An *Allegro* follows that begins with a contrapuntal passage and presents more permutations of the principal theme.) A brilliant Coda, in which the

initial theme by a last transformation, takes the form of a violin figure, ends the work.