

Concert of Wednesday, March 11, 2020, at 8:00p

Yoel Levi, Conductor

Itzhak Perlman, violin

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Overture to *La forza del destino* (1862)

Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 in G minor, Opus 26 (1866)

I. Vorspiel. Allegro moderato

II. Adagio

III. Finale. Allegro energico

Itzhak Perlman, violin

Intermission

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

Overture to *La forza del destino* (1862)

Giuseppe Verdi was born in Roncole, Italy, on October 9 or 10, 1813, and died in Milan, Italy, on January 27, 1901. The first performance of *La forza del destino* took place at the Bolshoi Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia, on November 10, 1862. The Overture to *La forza del destino* is scored for piccolo, flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, and strings. Approximate performance time is eight minutes.

In 1861, the famous tenor Enrico Tamberlik proposed that Giuseppe Verdi compose an opera—based upon a story of the Italian composer's choosing—for the Imperial Theater of St. Petersburg, Russia. Verdi finally decided upon a sprawling 1830s Spanish play, *Don Alvaro, or The Force of Destiny*, by Ángel de Saavedra, Duke of Rivas. Francesco Maria Piave, Verdi's librettist for several works, including *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, and *La traviata*, adapted the work for the operatic stage. The premiere took place in St. Petersburg on November 10, 1862.

Although *Forza* was a success with the public, Verdi felt the score was not sufficiently concise. Verdi finally revised the opera for an 1869 carnival season production at the La Scala Opera House in Milan. By that time, Piave had suffered a debilitating stroke. Verdi called upon the services of Antonio Ghislanzoni to assist him in reworking the libretto. The revised *La forza del destino*, which premiered at La Scala on February 27, 1869, was a resounding triumph and continues to be the version performed in opera houses around the world.

To this day, some find *Forza's* epic length (expanded by several crowd scenes) somewhat problematic. However, the basic tale is relatively straightforward. The story takes place in Spain and Italy, toward the middle of the 18th century. Don Alvaro accidentally kills the Marquis of Calatrava—the father of the woman he loves, Leonora di Vargas. Don Carlo, the Marquis's son, searches for Don Alvaro and Leonora in order to avenge his father's death. Don Carlo finally confronts Don Alvaro (now a priest), and challenges him to a duel. Don Alvaro mortally wounds Don Carlo, who in turn fatally stabs Leonora when she tries to comfort her brother. Don Alvaro curses the fates, but when he finally prays for forgiveness, Leonora dies in peace.

Verdi composed a Prelude for the original, 1862 version of *La forza del destino* that he revised into the famous Overture for the 1869 La Scala production. It is a magnificent orchestral showpiece that remains Verdi's most popular overture in the concert hall. Typical of overtures of the time, it incorporates various melodies from the opera. The Overture begins with the repeated ominous brass chords that serve to open Act II (*Allegro*). The strings play the relentless, churning

destiny motif that pursues Leonora di Vargas throughout the opera. Several further melodies from the opera—often accompanied by the destiny motif—are introduced with the unerring contrast and inexorable forward motion that are hallmarks of one of the lyric theater’s greatest dramatists. A rousing coda brings *The Force of Destiny* Overture to a stunning conclusion.

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 in G minor, Opus 26 (1866)

Max Bruch was born in Cologne, Germany, on January 6, 1838, and died in Friedenau, Germany, on October 2, 1920. The first performance of the G-minor Violin Concerto took place at the Music Institute of Koblenz on the Rhine, Koblenz, Germany, on April 24, 1866, with Otto von Königslöw as soloist, and the composer conducting the Gürzenich Orchestra of Cologne. In addition to the solo violin, the Concerto No. 1 is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-five minutes.

German composer Max Bruch’s earliest musical studies were with his mother, a noted singer and teacher. When he was eleven, Bruch composed an orchestral overture and some chamber music. By the age of fourteen, Bruch had written a symphony, as well as a string quartet that earned the Frankfurt Mozart Foundation Prize. Max Bruch ultimately established himself as a prominent composer, conductor and teacher. His compositions are prolific in number, and span an impressive range of vocal and instrumental genres.

As a conductor, Max Bruch directed many important orchestras, including the Liverpool Philharmonic Society and the Breslau Orchesterverein. Bruch taught at several institutions. His most prestigious appointment occurred in 1891, when he was named Professor of Music at the Berlin Academy. Max Bruch continued to teach at the Academy until his retirement in 1910. During the final three years of his tenure, Bruch also served as the Berlin Academy’s Vice-President.

Today, Bruch is chiefly remembered for a handful of works—his two Violin Concertos (1866 and 1878), the *Scottish Fantasy* for Violin and Orchestra (1880), and the *Kol Nidre* for Cello and Orchestra (1881). Bruch began composition of his First Violin Concerto at the age of nineteen, finally completing the work nine years later. The first performance took place on April 24, 1866, at a concert of the Music Institute of Koblenz on the Rhine. Bruch, then Music Director of Koblenz, conducted the Gürzenich Orchestra of Cologne. The Orchestra’s concertmaster, Otto von Königslöw, served as soloist.

“The richest and most enchanting”

Shortly after the premiere, Bruch decided to revise the Concerto. He forwarded the score to the eminent Austro-Hungarian violinist, Joseph Joachim. Due to the improvisational spirit of the Concerto’s opening movement, Bruch had contemplated renaming the work a “Fantasy.” Joachim disagreed, commenting: “For a fantasy, the last two movements are too completely and symmetrically developed. The different

sections are brought together in a beautiful relationship, yet and this is the principal thing—there is sufficient contrast.”

Bruch followed Joseph Joachim’s counsel. After penning extensive revisions, the composer dedicated the final version of his First Violin Concerto to Joachim, who gave its premiere in Bremen on January 5, 1868. In 1906, at his 75th birthday party, Joachim stated: “The Germans have four violin concertos,” and named those by Ludwig van Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn, Bruch, and Johannes Brahms. While Joachim praised each of these magnificent works, he commented: “Max Bruch wrote the richest and most enchanting of the four.”

Musical Analysis

I. *Vorspiel. Allegro moderato*—The opening movement (or “Prelude,” as Bruch calls it) begins in dramatic fashion, with a dialogue between orchestra and soloist. Then, over a wonderfully atmospheric combination of tremolo and pizzicato string accompaniment, the soloist plays a fiery melody. After a brief orchestral interlude, the soloist offers a far more lyrical, *espressivo* theme. An extended, dramatic episode follows, first highlighting the soloist, and then, the orchestra. A reprise of the opening orchestra-soloist dialogue leads to a brief passage, serving as a bridge to the slow-tempo movement, which follows without pause.

II. *Adagio*—The soloist presents a sequence of two lovely melodies that return throughout the movement—sometimes in varied fashion, as the basis of passionate interludes. The soloist repeats the original melodies in the movement’s peaceful conclusion.

III. *Finale. Allegro energico*—Over string tremolos, various instruments offer glimpses of what emerges as the central theme, boldly proclaimed by the soloist. The orchestra introduces a noble, subsidiary theme, immediately repeated by the soloist. The *Finale*, a combination of sonata and rondo forms, presents an almost continuous series of technical challenges for the soloist, who concludes the Concerto with a fiery, *Presto* sequence.

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), triangle, tam-tam, cymbals a2, suspended cymbal, bass drum with attached cymbals, harp, and strings. Approximate performance time is fifty-six minutes.

Recording: Telarc CD-80545, Yoel Levi, Conductor

“Like an impetuous torrent”

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.” In a contemporaneous letter, Mahler confided to his friend, archaeologist Fritz Löhr:

I should love, now, to have you next to me at the piano and be able to play it for you! You probably are the only one who in it will find nothing new about me; the others will find much to surprise them! These emotions became so powerful in me that they gushed forth like an impetuous torrent; you will hear it this summer. At a single blow, all the floodgates were opened within me! How this happened I'll tell you one day...Spring won't let me stay in the house any longer! I must get out and breathe air deeply again. For six weeks I have scarcely left my worktable!

At the time Mahler completed the work that would become known as his “Titan” Symphony, he was a conductor of the Neues Stadttheater in Leipzig. Mahler had just scored a brilliant success with performances of his completion of Carl Maria von Weber’s unfinished comic opera, *Die drei Pintos*. Mahler hoped that he could parlay this triumph into the opportunity to premiere his new Symphony. But a rift between Mahler and colleagues at the Stadttheater led to his resignation in May of 1888. Mahler was later appointed Music Director of the Royal Budapest Opera. And so it was in Budapest that Mahler premiered his First Symphony.

Early Performances

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,” and provided the following brief description:

Part I: 1. Introduction and Allegro comodo. 2. Andante. 3. Scherzo.

Part II: 4. A la pompes funèbres (sic); attacca. 5. Molto appassionato.

It appears that the members of the Budapest Philharmonic coped admirably with the considerable challenges of Mahler’s score. After the dress rehearsal the day before the premiere, Mahler sent a note to the orchestra congratulating them “for the devotion and the really artistic spirit with which you have helped me to bring my modest work to life. The dress rehearsal of today has already convinced me that I shall never again hear my work performed with such perfection.”

Despite the fine efforts of the Budapest orchestra, the work received a mixed reception from the premiere audience. The First Part was generally well received. The Second Part, which opened with a surreal funeral march, inspired mild approval, at best. There were even some boos. Later, Mahler recalled: “At Pest, where I conducted it for the first time, my friends avoided me in terror. Not a single one of them dared to speak to me about the work or the performance, and I wandered around like someone sick or outlawed.”

The critics, focusing upon what they perceived as Mahler’s bombast and lack of coherence, were perhaps even more negative. One writer faulted Mahler for not providing the audience with a written commentary on the meaning of his lengthy Symphonic Poem. Even August Beer, the Budapest critic most favorably disposed to the new work, lamented:

(I)n a symphonic poem, although it permits of incomparably greater freedom in form and layout, we require the music to be self-contained and to show a corresponding tendency for a specific train of thought to predominate, whether this be the illusion of a poetic idea, or a sequence of mental and physical events standing in a causal relationship to each other...Mahler’s composition gives the impression that a programme for the music was only subsequently projected.

In January of 1893, Mahler revised his “Symphonic Poem,” now designating it as a symphony. He affixed the nickname “Titan”—after a novel by Jean Paul—and also assigned titles to each of the Symphony’s five movements. Perhaps in response to initial critical reaction, Mahler provided a more detailed program for an October 27, 1893 Hamburg performance. It is reprinted below as part of the musical analysis.

“Where dark feelings hold sway”

It is important, however, to note the following caveats. Mahler ultimately grew to detest written explanations of his music: “Down with program books! They propagate false ideas!” Such distrust was consistent with Mahler’s view of the function of his music:

As long as my experience can be summed up in words, I write no music about it; my need to express myself musically—symphonically—begins where dark feelings hold sway, at the door that leads to the other world—the world where things are no longer separated by time and space.

The published edition of the score does not contain the 1893 program quoted below, nor does it include the work’s original second movement, “Blumine” (“Flower Chapter”). In its final version, the original five-movement “Symphonic Poem” is called “Symphony No. 1 in Four Movements for Large Orchestra.”

“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 premiere.

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 central Austrian-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 with Ludwig van 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.

Musical Analysis

Mahler’s 1893 program for his “Titan” Symphony is reproduced below in 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 “Titan” Symphony’s slow-tempo introduction demonstrates that the young Mahler was already a master of orchestral atmosphere. Over the strings’ sustained “A,” the woodwinds intone a descending fourth—the Symphony’s basic motif. Birdcalls (again in descending fourths) respond to distant fanfares. An undulating figure in the lower strings leads to a reprise of the birdcalls, in which the cuckoo (clarinet) is prominent. Its 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”). The melody is incorporated by various instruments, and then proclaimed by the entire orchestra. The mysteries of the introduction return, but horn calls lead to a restatement of the “Wayfarer” melody. The mounting tension resolves to a final, joyous statement of the principal melody, capped by the playful final bars.

“Blumine” (“Flower Chapter”) (Andante)

The “Blumine” is the original second movement that Mahler subsequently deleted. It is not included in these performances.

“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. Both the *ländler* tune and its vigorous accompaniment are closely related to the opening movement’s principal melody. 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)*—This is the movement that most troubled the audience and critics at the Symphony’s premiere. Over the insistent beat of the timpani (again in descending fourths), a solo muted bass softly chants a macabre variation of the children’s nursery song, “Frère Jacques” (“Are you sleeping, Brother John?”). From his early childhood, Mahler found the song (known in German as “Bruder Martin”) to be tragic, rather than playful. Various members of the orchestra play the melody in the form of a canon. The funeral march is interrupted by a village band episode that Mahler instructs be played “Mit Parodie.” The funeral march returns, only to be interrupted again; this time, by the heart-rending conclusion of the final “Wayfarer” Song, “Die zwei blauen Augen” (“The Two Blue Eyes”), in which the protagonist bids farewell to his beloved. The funeral march and village band episodes return. Finally, this extraordinary movement fades to silence.

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*)—A cymbal crash and orchestral explosion devastate the troubled repose of the previous movement. This introduction offers hints of what soon becomes the ascending principal theme, played by the brass and winds, and once again related to the opening movement's "Wayfarer" melody. The violence of the opening finally subsides, leading to an episode in which the violins introduce a lyrical melody. Echoes of the first movement and the opening of the finale lead to an impassioned development section. There are two presentations (the second more forceful) of a heroic variant of the finale's principal theme that will make a triumphant return at the Symphony's conclusion. Hints of the opening movement's slow-tempo introduction and principal melody appear, as well as a varied reprise of the finale's central themes. Fanfares from the opening movement return to launch the Symphony's glorious D-Major apotheosis.