Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2023-2024 Grand Classics Series

November 3, 4 and 5, 2023

JAMES GAFFIGAN, CONDUCTOR
BOMSORI, VIOLIN

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, "Jupiter"

I Allegro vivace
II. Andante cantabile
III. Menuetto: Allegretto
IV. Molto allegro

Intermission

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major, Op. 35

I. Allegro moderato
II. Canzonetta: Andante –
III. Finale: Allegro vivacissimo

Ms. Kim

Maurice Ravel *La Valse*, Poème choréographique

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, "Jupiter" (1788)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg; died December 5, 1791 in Vienna

PREMIERE OF WORK

- No information has survived concerning the premiere, although a concert of Vienna's Tonkünstler Societät in April 1791 did include "a grand symphony" by Mozart, and the "Jupiter" may have been that work.

PSO PREMIERE

- January 14, 1897; Carnegie Music Hall; Frederic Archer, conductor

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- April 23, 2017; Heinz Hall; Manfred Honeck, conductor

INSTRUMENTATION

- Flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

DURATION

- 34 minutes

Mozart's life was starting to come apart in 1788 – his money, health, family situation and professional status were all on the decline. He was a poor money manager, and the last years of his life saw him sliding progressively deeper into debt. One of his most generous creditors was Michael Puchberg, a brother Mason, to whom he wrote a letter that included the following pitiable statement: "If you, worthy brother, do not help me in this predicament, I shall lose my honor and my credit, which I so wish to preserve."

Sources of income dried up. His students had dwindled to only two by summer, and he had to sell his new compositions for a pittance to pay the most immediate bills. He hoped that Vienna would receive *Don Giovanni* as well as had Prague when that opera was premiered there the preceding year, but it was met with a haughty indifference when first heard in the Austrian capital in May 1788. He could no longer draw enough subscribers to produce his own concerts, and had to take second billing on the programs of other musicians. His wife, Constanze, was ill from worry and continuous pregnancy, and spent much time away from her husband taking cures at various mineral spas. On June 29th, their fourth child and only daughter, Theresia, age six months, died.

Yet, astonishingly, from these seemingly debilitating circumstances came one of the greatest miracles in the history of music. In the summer of 1788, in the space of only six weeks, Mozart composed the three greatest symphonies of his life: No. 39, in E-flat (K. 543) was finished on June 26th; the G minor (No. 40, K. 550) on July 25th; and the C major, "Jupiter" (No. 41, K. 551) on August 10th.

The "Jupiter" Symphony stands at the pinnacle of 18th-century orchestral art. It is grand in scope, impeccable in form and rich in substance. Mozart, always fecund as a melodist, was

absolutely profligate with themes in this Symphony. Three separate motives are successively introduced in the first dozen measures: a brilliant rushing gesture, a sweetly lyrical thought from the strings, and a marching motive played by the winds. The second theme is a simple melody first sung by the violins over a rocking accompaniment. The closing section of the exposition (begun immediately after a falling figure in the violins and a silence) introduces a jolly little tune that Mozart had originally written a few weeks earlier as a buffa aria for bass voice to be interpolated into *Le Gelosie Fortunate* ("*The Fortunate Jealousy*"), an opera by Pasquale Anfossi. Much of the development is devoted to an amazing exploration of the musical possibilities of this simple ditty. The thematic material is heard again in the recapitulation, but, as so often with Mozart, in a richer orchestral and harmonic setting.

The ravishing *Andante* is spread across a fully realized sonata form, with a compact but emotionally charged development section. The third movement (*Minuet*) is a perfect blend of the lighthearted rhythms of popular Viennese dances and Mozart's deeply expressive chromatic harmony.

The finale of this Symphony has been the focus of many a musicological assault. It is demonstrable that there are as many as five different themes played simultaneously at certain places in the movement, making this one of the most masterful displays of technical accomplishment in the entire orchestral repertory. But the listener need not be subjected to any numbing pedantry to realize that this music is really something special. Mozart was the greatest genius in the history of music, and he never surpassed this movement.

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major, Op. 35 (1878)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born May 7, 1840 in Votkinsk; died November 6, 1893 in St. Petersburg.

PREMIERE OF WORK

- December 4, 1881; Vienna; Hans Richter, conductor; Adolf Brodsky, soloist

PSO PREMIERE

- November 24, 1899; Carnegie Music Hall; Victor Herbert, conductor; Alexander Petschnikoff, soloist

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- February 23, 2020; Heinz Hall; Juraj Valcuha, conductor; Baiba Skride, soloist

INSTRUMENTATION

- two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

DURATION

- 38 minutes

In the summer of 1877, Tchaikovsky undertook the disastrous marriage that lasted less than three weeks and resulted in his emotional collapse and attempted suicide. He fled from Moscow to his brother Modeste in St. Petersburg, where he recovered his wits and discovered that he could find solace in his work. He spent the late fall and winter completing his Fourth

Symphony and the opera *Eugene Onégin*. The brothers decided that travel outside of Russia would be an additional balm to the composer's spirit, and they duly installed themselves at Clarens on Lake Geneva in Switzerland soon after the first of the year.

In Clarens, Tchaikovsky had already begun work on a piano sonata when he heard the colorful *Symphonie espagnole* by the French composer Edouard Lalo. He was so excited by the possibilities of a work for solo violin and orchestra that he set aside the sonata and immediately began a concerto of his own. By the end of April, the composition was finished. Tchaikovsky sent the manuscript to Leopold Auer, a friend who headed the violin department at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and who was also Court Violinist to the Czar, hoping to have him premiere the piece. Much to the composer's regret, Auer returned the piece as "unplayable," and apparently spread that word with such authority to other violinists that it was more than three years before the Violin Concerto was heard in public. It was Adolf Brodsky, a former colleague of Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatory, who first accepted the challenge of this Concerto when he premiered it with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1881.

The Concerto opens quietly with a tentative introductory tune. A foretaste of the main theme soon appears in the violins, around which a quick crescendo is mounted to usher in the soloist. After a few unaccompanied measures, the violin presents the movement's lovely main theme above a simple string background. After an elaborated repetition of this melody, a transition follows that eventually involves the entire orchestra and gives the soloist the first of many opportunities for pyrotechnical display. The second theme is the beginning of a long dynamic and rhythmic buildup that leads into the development with a sweeping, balletic presentation of the main theme by the full orchestra. The soloist soon steals back the attention with breathtaking leaps and double stops. The grand balletic mood returns, giving way to a brilliant cadenza as a link to the recapitulation. The flute sings the main theme for four measures before the violin takes it over, and all then follows the order of the exposition. An exhilarating coda asks for no fewer than four tempo increases, and the movement ends in a brilliant whirl of rhythmic energy.

The slow middle movement begins with a chorale for woodwinds that is heard again at the end of the movement to serve as a frame around the musical picture inside. On the canvas of this scene is displayed a soulful melody intoned by the violin with the plaintive suggestion of a Gypsy fiddler. The finale is joined to the slow movement without a break. With the propulsive spirit of a dashing Cossack *trepak*, the finale flies by amid the soloist's dizzying show of agility and speed. Like the first movement, this one also races toward its final climax. After playing the Concerto's premiere, Adolf Brodsky wrote to Tchaikovsky that the work was "wonderfully beautiful." He was right.

MAURICE RAVEL
La Valse, Poème choréographique (1919-1920)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born March 7, 1875 in Cliboure, France; died December 28, 1937 in Paris.

PREMIERE OF WORK

- December 12, 1920; Paris; Camille Chevillard, conductor

PSO PREMIERE

- November 5, 1935; Syria Mosque; Antonio Modarelli, conductor

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- April 6, 2014; Heinz Hall; Juraj Valcuha, conductor

INSTRUMENTATION

- Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, percussion, timpani, two harps and strings

DURATION

- 13 minutes

Ravel first considered composing a musical homage to Johann Strauss as early as 1906. The idea forced itself upon him again a decade later, but during the years of the First World War, he could not bring himself to work on a score which he had tentatively titled "*Wien*" ("*Vienna*"). Since the war had sapped a great deal of his energy, causing his health to be precarious for the rest of his life, it took a proposal from the great ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev in 1918 to convince Ravel to bring the project to fruition. (Diaghilev hoped to pair Ravel's new work with Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, but upon its completion, the impresario was dissatisfied with *La Valse* — "a masterpiece, but it's not a ballet," he said — which then had to wait until 1929 for its stage premiere under Ida Rubinstein.)

By January 1919, when Ravel was immersed in the composition of his tribute to Vienna, he said that he felt he was "waltzing frantically." He saw *La Valse* both as "a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz" and as a "fantastic and fatefully inescapable whirlpool." The "inescapable whirlpool" was the First World War toward which Vienna marched in three-quarter time, salving its social and political conscience with the luscious strains of Johann Strauss. There is more than a touch of the surreal in *La Valse*. Familiar and real things are placed against a background strange and a little threatening in its disorienting effect. This artifice paralleled the situation that Ravel saw as characteristic of late-19th-century Vienna in particular and Europe in general.

A surrealistic haze shrouds the opening of *La Valse*, a vague introduction from which fragments of themes gradually emerge. In the composer's words, "At first the scene is dimmed by a kind of swirling mist, through which one discerns, vaguely and intermittently, the waltzing couples. Little by little the vapors disappear, the illumination grows brighter, revealing an immense ballroom filled with dancers; the blaze of the chandeliers comes to full splendor. An Imperial court ball about 1855." In the form typical of the Viennese waltz, several continuous sections follow, each based on a different melody.

At the half-way point of the score, however, the murmurs of the introduction return, and the melodies heard previously in clear and complete versions are now fragmented, played against each other, unable to regain the rhythmic flow of their initial appearances. Persistent rustlings in the low strings and woodwinds, flutter-tongue wails from the flutes, snarling muted brass, abrupt and violent crescendos challenge the old waltz melodies. The musical panacea of 1855 cannot smother the reality of 1915, however, and the music becomes

consumed by the harsh thrust of the roaring triple meter transformed from a seductive dance into a demonic juggernaut. The dissonances grind, the rhythms become brutal, the orchestral colors blaze as the world of order is sucked toward the awaiting cataclysm in what Ravel called "a fantastic and fatal sort of dervish's dance." At the almost unbearable peak of tension, the dance is torn apart by a five-note figure spread through the entire orchestra, a figure so alien to the triple meter that it destroys the waltz and brings this brilliant, forceful and disturbing work to a shattering close.