

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2014-2015 Subscription Series

April 10, 11 and 12, 2015

MANFRED MARIA HONECK, CONDUCTOR  
HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD, PIANO

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 54

- I. Allegro affettuoso
  - II. Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso —
  - III. Allegro vivace
- Ms. Grimaud**

Intermission

ANTON BRUCKNER

Symphony No. 9 in D minor (Nowak Edition)

- I. Feierlich, Misterioso
- II. Scherzo: Bewegt, lebhaft
- III. Adagio: Langsam, feierlich

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### ROBERT SCHUMANN

Born 8 June 1810 in Zwickau, Germany; died 29 July 1856 in Endenich, near Bonn

#### Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in A minor, Opus 54 (1841, 1845)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Dresden, 4 December 1845; Hôtel de Saxe; Ferdinand Hiller, conductor; Clara Schumann, soloist

PSO PREMIERE: 9 February 1900; Carnegie Music Hall; Victor Herbert, conductor; Antoinette Szumowska, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 31 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani, strings

Schumann's Piano Concerto occupied a special place in his loving relationship with his wife, Clara. In 1837, three years before their marriage, Schumann wrote to her of a plan for a concerted work for piano and orchestra that would be "a compromise between a symphony, a concerto and a huge sonata." It was a bold vision for Schumann who had, with one discarded exception, written nothing for orchestra. In 1841, the second year of their marriage, he returned to his original conception, and produced a *Fantasia* in one movement for piano with orchestral accompaniment. That memorable year also saw the composition of his Symphony No. 1 and the first version of the Fourth Symphony, a burst of activity that had been encouraged by Clara, who wanted her husband to realize his potential in forms larger than the solo piano works and songs to which he had previously devoted himself. The *Fantasia* seemed to satisfy the desires of both husband and wife. Clara ran through the work at a rehearsal of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra on August 13, 1841, and Robert thought highly enough of the piece to try to have it published. His attempts to secure a publisher for the new score met with one rejection after another, however, and, with great disappointment, he laid the piece aside.

In 1844, Robert had a difficult bout with the recurring emotional disorder that plagued him throughout his life. After his recovery, he felt a new invigoration, and resumed composition with restless enthusiasm. In May 1845, the *Fantasia* came down from the shelf with Schumann's determination to breathe new life into it. He retained the original *Fantasia* movement, and added to it an *Intermezzo* and *Finale* to create the three-movement Piano Concerto, which was to become one of the most popular of all such works in the keyboard repertory.

Schumann's Piano Concerto is memorable not only for the beauty of its melodies and the felicity of its harmony, but also for the careful integration of its structure. Were the manner in which the work was composed unknown, there would be no way to tell that several years separate the creation of the first from the second and third movements. The Concerto's sense of unity arises principally from the transformations of the opening theme heard throughout the work. This opening motive, a lovely melody presented by the woodwinds after the fiery prefatory chords of the piano, pervades the first movement, serving not only as its second theme but also appearing in many variants in the development section. Even the coda, placed after a stirring cadenza, uses a double-time marching version of the main theme. The second movement is a three-part form with a soaring melody for cellos in its middle section. The movement's initial motive, a gentle dialogue between piano and strings, is another derivative of the first movement's opening theme. The principal theme of the sonata-form finale is yet another rendering of the Concerto's initial melody, this one a heroic manifestation in triple meter; the second theme employs extensive rhythmic syncopations. After a striding central section, the recapitulation begins in the dominant key so that the movement finally settles into the expected tonic major key only with the syncopated second theme.

Symphony No. 9 in D minor (1887, 1891-1896, Nowak Edition)

### ANTON BRUCKNER

Born 4 September 1824 in Ansfelden, Upper Austria; died 11 October 1896 in Vienna

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, 11 February 1903; Orchestra of the Vienna Concert Society; Ferdinand Löwe, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 5 May 1967; Syria Mosque; William Steinberg, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 60 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, three bassoons, eight horns, four Wagner tubas (a hybrid of horn and euphonium), three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings

“Often, I found him on his knees in profound prayer. As it was strictly forbidden to interrupt him under these circumstances, I stood by and overheard his naive, pathetic interpolations in the traditional texts. At times he would suddenly exclaim, ‘Dear God, let me get well soon; you see I need my health to finish the Ninth.’” This touching report of Anton Bruckner during his last months came from Dr. Richard Heller, a physician who attended the ailing composer while he was in a fierce race against death to complete his D minor Symphony.

Bruckner began sketching his Ninth Symphony in 1887, as soon as he had completed the Symphony No. 8. He collected many ideas for the new work, but decided to set the piece aside so that he could revise several of his earlier symphonies, notably the First and the just-completed Eighth. These painstaking revisions caused Bruckner great difficulties, dragging on for four years and sapping much of his strength and spirit. By 1889, when he turned 65, Bruckner began to suffer from dropsy, the accumulation of fluids in the body tissues, the painful disease that had afflicted Beethoven. In the spring of the following year, he was stricken with a chronic catarrh, or inflammation, of the larynx, and began to show signs of an abnormal nervous condition. In the fall, he was relieved of his duties as organ professor at the Vienna Conservatory; he retired as professor emeritus in January 1891.

Despite his deteriorating health, Bruckner returned to the D minor Symphony in April, telling the conductor Herman Levy, “I have already written down most of the themes.” The first movement was done by October 1892, the same year he left his position as organist at the Court Chapel, but work on the Symphony became more difficult with each passing month. A severe attack of dropsy in the fall of 1893, worsened by an attendant heart condition, prevented the completion of the *Scherzo* and *Adagio* until 1894.

During the remaining two years of his life, after he had given his last lectures at the University of Vienna and largely withdrawn from the world, Bruckner worked solely on the gigantic finale he planned to crown his Symphony. He realized that this would be his last composition (one theme in the *Adagio* is labeled “Farewell to Life”), and he prayed daily (and often invited his visitors to join him) that God would grant him the time to complete the score: “I have done my duty on earth. I have accomplished what I could, and my only wish is to be allowed to complete my Ninth Symphony.... There remains only the finale. I trust Death will not deprive me of my pen.... If He refuses, then He must take the responsibility for its incompleteness.” Finished or not, the deeply religious Bruckner told Dr. Heller of his plans for the dedication of the new work: “I have made dedications to two earthly majesties: poor King Ludwig [of Bavaria], as a patron of the arts, and to our illustrious dear Emperor Franz Joseph, as the highest earthly majesty that I know. Now I dedicate to the Lord of lords, to my dear God, my last work, and hope that He will grant me enough time to finish it and will generously accept my gift.”

Bruckner tried mightily to bring the Symphony to a conclusion. He worked on the finale whenever he felt able, sometimes even arising in the middle of the night to scratch down some thought or other. His housekeeper, Kathi Kachelmeyer (Bruckner never married), remonstrated with him for being out of bed when his health was so poor, but he responded by telling her, “One must compose when the right idea comes.” And ideas there were in abundance for the closing movement. The six extant variants of the finale, among whose shaky pen-strokes are scattered phrases from *The Lord’s Prayer*, stretch to some 400 measures, but none of the versions includes an ending, the necessary coda that would round out Bruckner’s overall vision of the work. It seems likely that the composer, who also suffered mental lapses in his last year, could not conceive the finish of the Symphony — could not bring about the overwhelming catharsis demanded by the earlier movements. (The sketches indicate that this finale would have been of a larger dimension than even those for the Fifth and Eighth Symphonies. An attempt by the American musicologist William Carragan in 1984 to make a performing edition from the available material was generally judged as unsuccessful.) In the event that death prevented the completion of the score, Bruckner suggested that the choral *Te Deum* of 1885 should be used as the finale. This request had more to do with his sense of classical formal balance, which demanded a symphony of four movements, than it did with musical suitability, however, and his stop-gap measure is seldom used. Despite his

fervent prayers and hopeful determination, the Ninth Symphony was left incomplete. He worked on the manuscript on the morning he died — October 11, 1896.

In 1896, the poor state of Bruckner's health was more widely known than was his progress on the Ninth Symphony, and it was assumed that he left the work in an unperformable state. Great was the public surprise, then, when the Bruckner disciple Ferdinand Löwe announced, six years after the composer died, that he had completed the score of the first three movements from the manuscript, added the *Te Deum* as the finale, and would perform the Symphony with the Vienna Concert Society on February 11, 1903. The composer's biographer Josef V. Wöss reported that the audience was "spellbound" by the performance. However, some questions about the fidelity of Löwe's edition to Bruckner's true thoughts were raised. In the periodical *Zeitschrift für Musik*, Max Auer asked, "Where are those abrupt, Bruckneresque transitions between the passages? Why do the various phrases end in gentle exhalations? In short, whence comes this odd finesse, this smooth polish, into the work of a composer universally noted for his rugged individuality?" The questions remained unanswered until the Bruckner Society sponsored a private concert in Munich on April 4, 1932 at which were performed both the Löwe edition and a new one by Robert Haas and Alfred Orel, which resurrected Bruckner's original version. It was found that Löwe had made radical changes in the score, altering the dynamic scheme, many of the tempo indications, much of the orchestration, and even parts of the harmonic structure. That concert in Munich was perhaps the most important stimulus toward the modern view of Bruckner, which holds that he knew exactly what he was doing, and that the revisions of his symphonies he and others undertook only clouded the brilliance of the originals in concept and in detail. The Ninth Symphony is almost always performed today in the original three-movement version, without finale.

The majestic scale of the work is established with the grandiose sonata form of the opening movement. The main theme group comprises three thematic motives. The first motive, reminiscent of the Kyrie from Bruckner's youthful *Missa Solemnis* of 1854, is intoned by the horns above a premonitory quivering in the strings. The second motive, a woodwind phrase based on a melodic figure turning around a single note, builds directly into the stentorian unison statement of the third, octave-leap motive by the full orchestra. Following a pause ("When I have something important to say, I must take a deep breath first," Bruckner once explained), a quiet transition with pizzicato strings bridges to the second theme, a long melody of tender warmth played by the strings. The closing theme, an arch-shaped strain based on open chordal intervals, is initiated by the winds in imitation. The development section elaborates the moods and themes established in earlier pages. The recapitulation rolls in on an overwhelming wave of sound enfolding the third (octave-leap) motive, which is considerably extended before giving way to the tender second theme, presented here in a richer and darker setting. The movement ends with a mighty but hollow-sounding blast for massed instruments based on the octave-leap motive.

"When they hear that, they won't know what to make of it; but by that time, I'll be in my grave," predicted Bruckner of the spectral *Scherzo*. He referred specifically to the harmonic vocabulary of the movement, perhaps the most modern and daring in any of his symphonies, and to the music's haunted mood and violent outbursts, which reflect characteristics of the comparable movement in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The contrasting trio is a nimble essay, which, like the *Scherzo*, attains by itself virtually the proportions of a full sonata movement.

Bruckner called this *Adagio* the most beautiful of all his slow movements. Though he considered the Symphony unfinished, it is hard to imagine what music could follow this sublime statement of the composer's intense, mystical faith. Josef Wöss detected several quotations from Bruckner's earlier compositions in the movement, and surmised that it was intended as a valedictory summing-up of his works. The composer himself may have regarded it as such, since he marked one passage, "Farewell to Life." He included in the scoring one of his most treasured tonal resources — a choir of four Wagner tubas, the velvet-voiced hybrid of baritone horn and standard French horn, as his final homage to his revered master, Richard Wagner. (He prayed at Wagner's grave every day during his last visit to Bayreuth, in August 1892.) It was, appropriately, with this sound that Bruckner ended his last completed movement. Two lines from a poem that Moritz von Mayfeld dedicated to Bruckner summarize not only the mood of this rapturous *Adagio*, but also the philosophy by which its creator lived his life: "Art had its beginning with God — And so it must lead back to God."