Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2015-2016 Mellon Grand Classics Season

June 10 and 12, 2016

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, CONDUCTOR

SERGEI PROKOFIEV — Suite from *Lieutenant Kijé*, Opus 60
- I. The Birth of Kijé
- II. Romance
- III. Kijé's Wedding
- IV. Troika
- V. The Burial of Kijé

AARON COPLAND — *El Salón México*

Intermission

THE EARTH – AN HD ODYSSEY

RICHARD STRAUSS — *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Opus 30

JOHN ADAMS — *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born 23 April 1891 in Sontsovka, Russia; died 4 March 1953 in Moscow

Suite from *Lieutenant Kijé*, Opus 60 (1933-1934)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Moscow, 21 December 1934; Soviet State Radio Orchestra; Sergei Prokofiev, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: 7 January 1944; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 19 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, tenor saxophone, four horns, cornet, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, percussion, harp, celesta, piano and strings

Lieutenant Kijé, directed by Alexander Feinzimmer, was a portrait of early-19th-century Russia and a satire on government bungling and militarism. Russian-born American scholar Nicholas Slonimsky described the plot: "The subject of the film is based on an anecdote about Czar Nicholas I, who misread the report of his military aid so that the last syllable of the name of a Russian officer which ended *ki* and the Russian expletive *jé* formed a non-existent name, *Kijé*. The obsequious courtiers, fearful of pointing out to the Czar the mistake he had made, decided to invent an officer of that name. Hence all kinds of comical adventures and fictitious occurrences." The mythical soldier was really a blessing in disguise, since the blame for any bureaucratic bungling could be dumped on his head. So great were the errors ascribed to Kijé that he was banished to Siberia, but recalled by Nicholas in a surprising burst of clemency. When the Czar expressed a desire to meet this remarkable officer, he was informed — alas — that the good man had just expired. Prokofiev was delighted with the story. Not only did his music underline the moments of humor and satire in the film, but he also sought to recreate the epoch of early 19th-century Russia in musical terms, just as he had summoned up the courtly world of Haydn in the "Classical" Symphony.

I. *Birth of Kijé*. Kijé enters the world to the distant sound of a bugle call, his heroic, martial nature determined even before his appearance. The drum and piccolo kick off a jaunty little march tune that seems to have difficulty finding its proper key. Soon a pompous parade wheels through the full orchestra.

II. *Romance*. This sad song was sung in the film by a baritone soloist to a text about his vanished sweetheart. In the Suite, the melody is entrusted to the reedy voice of the tenor saxophone.

III. *Kijé's Wedding*. Kijé's wedding is accompanied by a blustery tune whose banality and "oom-pah" underpinning suggest that the "wedding chapel" might be a tavern.

IV. *Troika*. Based on perhaps Prokofiev's most widely known melody, this section suggests both a ride in the three-horse sleigh of the title and another rollicking tavern song. Again the tenor saxophone takes over the part sung in the film by a baritone to the words, "A woman's heart is like an inn: All those who are about, Keep going in and coming out, Night and day they roam about."

V. *Burial of Kijé*. Rather a summary report than a dirge, this final movement combines themes from the earlier episodes of Kijé's curious existence in a deft contrapuntal setting. The distant bugle call which ushered into the world the Lieutenant — who, incidentally, made the rank of General before his demise — escorts him back to the misty oblivion from which he was originally conjured.

AARON COPLAND

Born 14 November 1900 in Brooklyn, New York; died 2 December 1990 in North Tarrytown, New York

El Salón México (1933-1936)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Mexico City, 27 August 1937; Orquesta Sinfonica; Carlos Chávez, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: 18 October 1941; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 11 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano and strings

Copland explained that the inspiration for his *El Salón México* was a visit south of the border in 1932: "Perhaps my piece might never have been written if it hadn't been for the existence of the 'Salón México.' I remember reading about it for the first time in Anita Brenner's guide book. Under 'Entertainment' she had this entry: 'Harlem type nightclub for the peepul [sic], grand Cuban orchestra, *Salón México*. Three halls: one for people dressed in your way, one for people dressed in overalls but shod, and one for the barefoot.' Miss Brenner forgot to mention the sign on the wall that said: 'Please don't throw lighted cigarette butts on the floor so the ladies don't burn their feet.' The unsuspecting tourist should also have been warned that a guard stationed at the bottom of the steps leading to the 'three halls' would nonchalantly frisk you as you started up the stairs just to be sure that you had checked all your 'artillery' at the door. One other curious custom, special to the Salón México, might as well be mentioned here: when the dance hall closed its doors at 5:00 a.m. it hardly seemed worthwhile for the overalled patrons to travel all the way home, so they curled themselves up on the chairs around the walls for a quick two-hour snooze before getting to a seven o'clock job in the morning…. It wasn't the music that I heard there, or the dances that attracted me, so much as the spirit of the place. In some inexplicable way, while milling about in those crowded halls, one really felt a live contact with the Mexican *people* — their humanity, their separate shyness, their dignity and unique charm.... At any rate, I soon found myself looking for suitable folk material for *El Salón México...."*

In his preface to the orchestral score, Gerald Abraham commented on Copland's technique in this work: "Although the material of *El Salón México* is practically all derived from three or four melodies printed in the collections of Campos and Toor, none of these is quoted completely in its original form. The operative word is 'derived.' Copland has mentally absorbed the spirit and the characteristic idioms of Mexican folk music in general, and of these three or four tunes in particular, and reproduced them in music that is in all essentials his own. The original melodies have been altered both melodically and rhythmically, and always subtilized in the process."

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born 11 June 1864 in Munich; died 8 September 1949 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Also sprach Zarathustra ("*Thus spake Zarathustra*"), Opus 30

PREMIERE OF WORK: Frankfurt, 27 November 1896; Orchestra of the Museum Concerts; Richard Strauss, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: 10 February 1939; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 32 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: two piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two bass tubas, timpani, percussion, organ, two harps and strings

Back in the days when Richard Strauss was considered The World's Greatest Composer, a popular literary sport grew up around his works to fit them with plots or stories or programs. Strauss was always chary with verbal information about the "meaning" of his tone poems, and, since he did not discourage others from having a go at it, a whole barrage of possible "explanations" greeted each new work. *Also sprach Zarathustra*, deriving in some manner, at least, from the universal vision of Friedrich Nietzsche's poem (left incomplete at his removal to a mental hospital), was an especially inviting target for the hurlers of literary tracts. The composer approved almost all of the efforts that came along (they were, after all, good publicity, and Strauss — and his very large income — thrived on publicity), so the latter-day reader is left with a bundle of occasionally contradictory evidence. The truth of the matter seems to be that Strauss' music and Nietzsche's poem actually share little more than a title and a few pretentious ideas. Virtually every attempt to equate a section of the tone poem with a specific passage from the poem has been unconvincing.

Though its philosophical intentions are correctly questioned, there has never been any doubt about the expressive powers of this music. (It was the Budapest premiere of *Also sprach Zarathustra* that

inspired the young Béla Bartók to devote his life to composition.) The sections of Strauss' tone poem mirror several strong emotional states, as indicated by the following program note that appeared at the work's premiere, conducted by the composer in Frankfurt on November 27, 1896. "First movement: *Sunrise, Man feels the power of God. Andante religioso*. But still man longs. He plunges into passion (second movement) and finds no peace. He turns toward science, and tries in vain to solve life's problems in a fugue (third movement). Then agreeable dance tunes sound and he becomes an individual, and his soul soars upward while the world sinks far below him." There is a progression inherent in the work, a sort of a-religious Pilgrim's Progress, toward some transcendent state. One German writer, Rudolf Kloiber, viewed *Also sprach Zarathustra* as "a colorfully formed music-drama without words.... Strauss chose from the poem the speeches of Zarathustra to create a kind of scenario for the content and form of the work." There are three overtly programmatic elements that unify the work. The first is heard immediately at the outset. It is the theme of Nature, the unison call by four trumpets based on the most fundamental acoustical pitches in the musical spectrum: C-G-C (inextricably wedged in the public consciousness by Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*). The second is a sinister theme, perhaps depicting Fate, introduced by the trombones in the section, "Of joys and passions." The third is the conflict between the C tonality — representing Nature — and that of B, the latter standing for Man's aspirations. The unsettled struggle between these two (the technical term is bi-tonality) is most clearly discerned at the very end of the work, but it occurs many times throughout the piece.

JOHN ADAMS

Born 15 February 1947 in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Short Ride in a Fast Machine (Fanfare for Great Woods) (1986)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Mansfield, Massachusetts, 13 June 1986; Great Woods Performing Arts Center; Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra; Michael Tilson Thomas, conductor
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 5 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, four clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, synthesizer and strings

John Adams is one of today's most acclaimed composers. Audiences have responded enthusiastically to his music, and he enjoys a success not seen by an American composer since the zenith of Aaron Copland's career: a recent survey of major orchestras conducted by the League of American Orchestras found John Adams to be the most frequently performed living American composer; he received the University of Louisville's distinguished Grawemeyer Award in 1995 for his Violin Concerto; in 1997, he was the focus of the New York Philharmonic's Composer Week, elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and named "Composer of the Year" by *Musical America Magazine*; he has been made a *Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Ministry of Culture; in 1999, Nonesuch released *The John Adams Earbox*, a critically acclaimed ten-CD collection of his work; in 2003, he received the Pulitzer Prize for *On the Transmigration of Souls*, written for the New York Philharmonic in commemoration of the first anniversary of the World Trade Center attacks, and was also recognized by New York's Lincoln Center with a two-month retrospective of his work titled "John Adams: An American Master," the most extensive festival devoted to a living composer ever mounted at Lincoln Center; from 2003 to 2007, Adams held the Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie Hall; in 2004, he was awarded the Centennial Medal of Harvard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences "for contributions to society" and became the first-ever recipient of the Nemmers Prize in Music Composition, which included residencies and teaching at Northwestern University; he was a 2009 recipient of the NEA Opera Award; he has been granted honorary doctorates from the Juilliard School and Cambridge, Harvard, Yale and Northwestern universities, honorary membership in Phi Beta Kappa, and the California Governor's Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts.

For the recording of this work by the San Francisco Symphony on Nonesuch Records, Michael Steinberg wrote, "*Short Ride in a Fast Machine* is a joyfully exuberant piece, brilliantly scored for a large orchestra including two synthesizers. Commissioned for the opening of the Great Woods Festival in Mansfield, Massachusetts, it was first played on that occasion, June 13, 1986, by the Pittsburgh Symphony under Michael Tilson Thomas. The steady marking of a beat is typical of Adams' music. *Short*

Ride begins with a marking of quarters (woodblock, soon joined by the four trumpets) and eighths (clarinets and synthesizers), but the woodblock is *fortissimo* and the other instruments play *forte*. Adams describes the woodblock's persistence as 'almost sadistic' and thinks of the rest of the orchestra as running the gauntlet through that rhythmic tunnel. About the title: 'You know how it is when someone asks you to ride in a terrific sports car, and then you wish you hadn't?' It is, in any event, a wonderful opening music for a new American outdoor festival."