

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2015-2016 Mellon Grand Classics Season

June 17, 18 and 19, 2016

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR
NOAH BENDIX-BALGLEY, VIOLIN

WOLFGANG AMADEUS
MOZART

Rondo in C major for Violin and Orchestra, K. 373
MR. BENDIX-BALGLEY

NOAH BENDIX-BALGLEY

Fidl-Fantazye: A Klezmer Concerto
for Violin and Orchestra
(orchestrated by Samuel Adler)

- I. Khosidl - Doina - Balkan Dance: Sam's Syrtos
- II. Doina - Lied (Song) - Hora
- III. Doina – Freylekhs
Played without pause

Mr. Bendix-Balgley

WORLD PREMIERE

Intermission

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor

PART I

I. Trauermarsch

II. Stürmisch bewegt, mit grösster Vehemeng

PART II

III. Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

PART III

IV. Adagietto: Sehr langsam

V. Rondo-Finale: Allegro

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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

Rondo in C major for Violin and Orchestra, K. 373 (1781)

PREMIERE: Vienna, April 8, 1781; Antonio Brunetti, soloist

PSO PREMIERE: 2 February 1951; Syria Mosque; Paul Paray, conductor; Nathan Milstein, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 5 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: two oboes, two horns and strings

Antonio Brunetti, principal violinist of the archiepiscopal orchestra in Salzburg from March 1, 1776, was responsible for the creation of Mozart's two brief works for solo violin and orchestra. The *Adagio* (K. 261) was written late in 1776 as a substitute slow movement for the Concerto No. 5 in A major, K. 219; the *Rondo* (K. 373), Mozart's last concerted work for violin, dates from April 1781. The composer, still in the employ of the Archbishop Colloredo at the time of the latter work, was visiting Vienna when he learned that Colloredo would be making an official stop in the imperial city. As part of the ceremonies surrounding the event, a concert was arranged at the Viennese home of the Archbishop's father for April 8th, and Mozart was asked by Brunetti to provide a new violin piece for the program. Mozart responded with this charming *Rondo*, which is apparently an independent composition, since none of the string concertos shares its C major tonality. Less than a month after the *Rondo* was written, Mozart bolted from the musical establishment of the Archbishop to begin his Viennese adventure.

NOAH BENDIX-BALGLEY

Born 15 July 1984 in Asheville, NC

Fidl-Fantazyze: A Klezmer Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (2016)

Orchestrated by Samuel Adler

THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE WORLD PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 22 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

Though Jewish instrumental music is Biblical in reference and ancient in practice (a reed-piper of the 2nd century AD named Yakobius ben Yakobius is the earliest player known by name), the characteristic style now called *klezmer* is rooted primarily in the 18th- and 19th-century secular musical practices in the so-called Tsarist Pale of Settlement, a huge swath of Jewish communities in eastern Europe stretching from Lithuania and Poland to the Black Sea. The term "*klezmer*" was derived from the Hebrew words "*kley*" and "*zemer*," literally "vessel of song," or musical instrument. It was applied first to the instrumental ensemble (traditionally one or two violins, cimbalom, bass, occasionally flute, sometimes brass and later clarinet) that performed at Jewish weddings and other festive gatherings, then to the musicians — professionals, who banded together in guilds and passed their techniques and repertory, just a tiny fraction of it notated, down to their sons and sons-in-law — and only more recently to the musical style itself. *Klezmer* blended the cantorial formulas of the synagogue and the expressive, fiery idioms of eastern European Gypsy (Roma) fiddlers (with whom the *klezmerim* often traveled and performed) with the creative communal genius of generations of early practitioners. *Klezmer* came to America with the great migrations around the turn of the 20th century. A number of recordings were issued after the First World War, but interest in the distinctive style waned with the decline of Yiddish theater in New York and Jewish assimilation into the wider culture, though Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich and others found uses for its idioms in some of their compositions. (The opening

clarinet slide of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* may have a *klezmer* origin.) A revival of *klezmer* in the 1970s, part of the general interest in little-explored world musics that exploded at that time, was led by such artists as the clarinetists Dave Tarras and Giora Feidman and the Berkeley-based band The Klezmerim, and *Klezmer* is today a vital part of our musical experience that more than lives up to the advertising applied to several American recordings of the 1920s: *Freilech Music* — “*Joyful Music*.”

Noah Bendix-Balgley wrote of his *Fidl-Fantazy: A Klezmer Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, “I grew up around klezmer music and it had a significant influence on my musical upbringing. My father, Erik Bendix, is a dance teacher who specializes in Eastern European folk dancing. He is an expert on Yiddish dance, so as a child I often listened to recordings of klezmer music or heard live bands play at workshops and festivals where my father taught. I began picking up klezmer tunes shortly after I had started playing the violin. I then was lucky to learn from great klezmer musicians such as Michael Alpert and Alan Bern of Brave Old World and Alicia Svigals of The Klezmatics. To this day, playing klezmer music is a wonderful counterweight to my classical playing, since it allows the performer to improvise and embellish on the spot. Developing this freedom helps me play with greater flexibility and imagination within the stricter structures of classical repertoire. Klezmer music is vividly emotional, ranging from deeply mourning improvisations to the irresistible drive of its fast dance music.

“The idea of a klezmer violin concerto was one I had for a while, since I was looking for a virtuoso piece in the klezmer style to play with orchestra. My original thought was to commission the work from another composer, but I was encouraged by my father, as well as by Manfred Honeck and Michael Alpert, to write the work myself. I am thankful to them for that suggestion.

“I decided to write a virtuosic violin fantasy accompanied by full orchestra. I am extremely grateful that the wonderful composer Samuel Adler agreed to orchestrate the piece for me, realizing a full version of the violin and piano score that I composed.

“My first question when composing was whether to use existing traditional klezmer melodies or to compose my own. I decided to compose my own tunes in the style of traditional ones I have learned over the years.

“The piece is constructed in three movements that are played without pause. Each movement is a medley of different dances. After a short orchestral introduction, the violin enters alone, playing a simple *Khosidl* tune, a slow and heavy line dance in the old Hassidic style. The violin soon plays duets with various other solo instruments, presenting the tune in virtuosic style. This is followed by a *Doina*, a Romanian-style improvisation over a held harmony, the first of three *Doina* sections in the piece that serve as transitions. The melody of the next section uses my musical translation of the name Samuel: E-flat (eS in German), A, E-natural (Mi in solfège), C (Ut in solfège), E, A (La in solfège). My middle name is Samuel, after my great-grandfather, Samuel Leventhal, who was a violinist. Like me, he went to Germany to study violin, and then joined the Pittsburgh Symphony. He was later concertmaster of the Hartford Symphony. Because of my connection with him as well as the happy coincidence that Samuel Adler is the orchestrator of this work, the musical version of the name felt like a nice dual homage. It appears throughout the work in different forms. Sam's *Syrtos* at the end of the first movement is a dance in mixed meter (7/8) and refers to the *Syrtos* music of the Greek islands that was absorbed into klezmer music under the name *Terkisher*, or “in the Turkish style,” Greece having long ago been under Ottoman Turkish rule.

“The second movement opens with another *Doina* that features a duet with solo viola. This leads to a slow *Nigun* or *Lid*, a wordless song which then becomes a *Hora*, a slow dance in triple meter. Here I incorporate small quotes from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, the work on the second half of this concert. Gustav Mahler incorporated klezmer tunes and elements into a number of his works (most famously in the third movement of the First Symphony). Here my quotations of his melodies came from the question: what if the classical melodies in Mahler's Fifth Symphony had been inspired by klezmer tunes? What would those tunes have sounded like? So in the second movement of the *Fantazy*, I incorporated some Mahler into a version of *Hora*, and wove more Mahler into my version of *Freylekhs*.

“The third movement is an extended medley of fast tunes, alternating between full orchestra and smaller ensembles within the orchestra. Throughout I wanted the solo violin to trade off tunes with individual members of the orchestra. At the end, the full orchestra joins in with a wild race to the finish.”

GUSTAV MAHLER

Born 7 July 1860 in Kalist, Bohemia; died 18 May 1911 in Vienna

Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor (1901-1902, revised through 1911)

PREMIERE: Cologne, 18 October 1904; Gürzenich Orchestra; Gustav Mahler, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 6 April 1956; Syria Mosque; William Steinberg, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 76 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: two piccolos, four flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

In November 1901, Mahler met Alma Schindler, daughter of the painter Emil Jacob Schindler, then 22 and regarded as one of the most beautiful women in Vienna. Mahler was 41. Romance blossomed. They were married in March, and were parents by November. Their first summer together (1902) was spent at Maiernigg, Mahler's country retreat on the Wörthersee in Carinthia in southern Austria. It was at that time that the Fifth Symphony was composed, incorporating some sketches from the previous summer. He thought of this work as "their" music, the first artistic fruit of his married life with Alma. But more than that, he may also have wanted to create music that would be worthy of the new circle of friends that Alma, the daughter of one of Austria's finest artists and most distinguished families, had opened to him — Gustav Klimt, Alfred Roller (who became Mahler's stage designer at the Court Opera), architect Josef Hoffmann and the rest of the cream of cultural Vienna. In the Fifth Symphony, Mahler seems to have taken inordinate care to demonstrate the mature quality of his thought (he was, after all, nearly twice Alma's age) and to justify his lofty position in Viennese artistic life as director of the Court Opera, a circumstance that brought about a radical change in his creative language.

The musical style that Mahler initiated with the Fifth Symphony is at once more abstract yet more powerfully expressive than that of his earlier music. In his fine book on the composer, Egon Gartenberg noted that the essential quality differentiating the later music from the earlier was a "volcanic change to modern polyphony," a technique of concentrated contrapuntal development that Mahler had derived from an intense study of the music of Bach. "You can't imagine how hard I am finding it, and how endless it seems because of the obstacles and problems I am faced with," Mahler confided to his friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner while struggling with the Symphony's third movement. Free of his duties at the Opera between seasons, he labored throughout the summer of 1902 on the piece at his little composing hut in the woods, several minutes walk from the main house at Maiernigg. So delicate was the process of creation that he ordered Alma not to play the piano while he was working lest the sound, though distant, should disturb him (she was a talented musician and budding composer until her husband forbid her to practice those skills after their wedding), and he even complained that the birds bothered him because they sang in the wrong keys (!). Every few days he brought his rough sketches to Alma, who copied them over and filled in some of the orchestral lines according to his instructions.

The composition was largely completed by early autumn when the Mahlers returned to Vienna, but Gustav continued to revise the orchestration throughout the winter, daily stealing a few early-morning minutes to work on it before he raced to the Opera House. The tinkering went on until a tryout rehearsal with the Vienna Philharmonic early in 1904. Alma, listening from the balcony, reported with alarm, "I heard each theme in my head while copying the score, but now I could not hear them at all! Mahler had overscored the kettledrums and percussion so madly and persistently that little beyond the rhythm was recognized." Major changes were in order, Alma advised. Mahler agreed, immediately crossed out most of the percussion parts, and spent seemingly endless hours during the next seven years further altering the orchestration so that it would clearly reveal the complex musical textures. Hardly any two performances of the work during his lifetime were alike. The premiere in Cologne brought mixed responses from audience and critics. Even Bruno Walter, Mahler's protégé and assistant at the Vienna Opera and himself a master conductor and interpreter of his mentor's music, lamented of the first performance, "It was the first time and, I think, the only time that a performance of a Mahler work under his own baton left me unsatisfied. The instrumentation did not succeed in bringing out clearly the complicated contrapuntal fabric of the parts." It was not until one of his last letters, in February 1911, that Mahler could finally say, "The Fifth is finished. I have been forced to re-orchestrate it completely. I fail to comprehend how at that time [1902] I could have blundered so like a greenhorn."

Mahler grouped the five movements of the Fifth Symphony into three parts. Thus, the opening *Trauermarsch* takes on the character of an enormous introduction to the second movement. The two are further joined in their sharing of some thematic material. The giant *Scherzo* stands at the center point of the Symphony, the only movement not linked with another. Balancing the opening movements are the *Adagietto* and the *Rondo-Finale* of Part III, which have the quality of preface and summation.

The structures of the individual movements of the Symphony No. 5 are large and complex, bearing allegiance to the classical models, but expanded and re-shaped, with continuous development and intertwining of themes. The *Trauermarsch* is sectional in design, alternating between music based on the opening trumpet summons and an intensely sad threnody presented by the strings. The following movement ("Stormily moving. With great vehemence") resembles sonata form, with a soaring chorale climaxing the development section only to be cut short by the return of the stormy music of the recapitulation. The *Scherzo* juxtaposes a whirling waltz/*Ländler* with trios more gentle in nature. The serene *Adagietto*, perhaps the most famous (and most often detached) single movement among Mahler's symphonies, serves as a calm interlude between the gigantic movements surrounding it. The closing movement (*Rondo-Finale*) begins as a rondo, but interweaves the principal themes with those of the episodes as it unfolds in a blazing display of contrapuntal craft. The triumphant chorale that was snuffed out in the second movement is here returned to bring the Symphony to an exalted close.