June 7, 2014

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR
NOAH BENDIX-BALGLEY, VIOLIN

JAMES MacMILLAN

Woman of the Apocalypse

A woman clothed by the sun — The great battle — She is given the wings of a great eagle — She is taken up — Coronation

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Romance No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra in G major, Opus 40

Romance No. 2 for Violin and Orchestra in F major, Opus 50

Intermission

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Opus 98

I. Allegro non troppo
II. Andante moderato
III. Allegro giocoso
IV. Allegro energico e passionato

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

JAMES MACMILLAN

Born 16 July 1959 in Kilwinning, Ayshire, Scotland.

Woman of the Apocalypse (2011-2012)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Santa Cruz, California, 4 August 2012
Cabrillo Music Festival Orchestra
Marin Alsop, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: Carnegie Hall, New York, NY, 10 May 2014; Manfred Honeck, conductor
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 27 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, three clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta, piano and strings.

Scottish composer James MacMillan, born in Kilwinning, Ayshire on July 16, 1959, was educated at the University of Edinburgh (B.Mus., 1981) and the University of Durham (Ph.D., 1987), where his principal teacher was John Casken. After working as a lecturer at Manchester University from 1986 to 1988, MacMillan returned to Scotland, where he has since fulfilled numerous important commissions and taught at the University of Edinburgh and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. He has also served as Artistic Director of the Edinburgh Contemporary Arts Trust, Affiliate Composer of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Composer/Conductor with the BBC Philharmonic, and Visiting Composer of the Philharmonia Orchestra and Artistic Director of its contemporary music series, Music Today; he became Principal Guest Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic in 2010. In 1993, MacMillan won both the Gramophone Contemporary Music Record of the Year Award and the Classic CD Award for Contemporary Music; he was made a CBE in 2004, given the 2008 British Composer Award for Liturgical Music, and named an Honorary Patron of the London Chamber Orchestra in 2008. In October 2014, MacMillan inaugurates the Cumnock Tryst, a festival of international scope that he organized in his boyhood home in southern Scotland.

Macmillan's compositions, many of which incorporate traditional Scottish elements and bear some stamp of either his religion (Catholicism) or his politics (socialism), include two operas, a *St. John Passion*, concerted works for piano (*The Berserking*), percussion (*Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*), cello, clarinet, organ and trumpet, orchestral scores, chamber works and pieces for solo voices and chorus. Of his creative personality, MacMillan wrote, "There are strong Scottish traits in my works, but also an aggressive and forthright tendency with a strong rhythmic physicality, showing the influence of Stravinsky, Messiaen and some minimalist composers.... In ideological terms, my works express the timeless truths of Roman Catholicism alongside a fierce social commitment. And musically one can hopefully sense the depths of times past integrating with attempts at innovation."

McMillan's *Woman of the Apocalypse* was inspired by Chapters 11 and 12 of the Book of Revelation, one of the most dramatic and visionary passages in world literature:

"Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, an earthquake and a violent hailstorm.

"A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. The dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The lady herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days.

"Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, who is called the Devil and Satan, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it.

"When the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, it pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert."

The Woman is most commonly interpreted to represent the Virgin Mary, who then undergoes a divine Assumption and is crowned Queen of Heaven. MacMillan wrote of his work, "*Woman of the Apocalypse* is a one-movement orchestral piece inspired by a range of visual art works on the topic through the ages by Dürer, Rubens, Doré, Blake, Marvenko and others. The music is a kind of tone poem or concerto for orchestra. Although it is in one continuous movement, it is divided into five sections, each with a title referring to some aspect of the image and narrative.

"1. *A Woman Clothed by the Sun*: Main themes are presented, including a falling figure on piano, harp and percussion, before the drama of the movement is carried forward by call-and-response developments led by trombones, then horns and then trumpets as the music progresses through metric modulations. The falling figure appears in reverse before leading to … 2. *The Great Battle*: There are growls in the low brass, but the main thread in this section is led by violas and English horn. An extended series of declamations in the brass choir then leads to … 3. *She Is Given the Wings of a Great Eagle*: Here the music scurries and floats, sometimes interrupted by one of the main fragments from the beginning before culminating in a violent surging on strings and percussion. 4. *She Is Taken Up*: This comprises mainly a series of fanfares and ecstatic soloistic writing for string quartet. The violent surging returns before the final section. 5. *Coronation*: This begins with very high violins and a return of some of the declamatory music for brass, this time in a slow, solemn, ritualistic procession. The strings gradually descend into their lower registers as the music heads to a relentless, pounding conclusion."

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born 16 December 1770 in Bonn; died 36 March 1827 in Vienna.

Romance No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra in G major, Op. 40 (1801-1802)
Romance No. 2 for Violin and Orchestra in F major, Op. 50 (1798)

PREMIERE OF WORK: unknown
PSO PREMIERE: 6 December 1946, Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor; Joseph Szigeti, soloist AND 27 January 1898, Carnegie Music Hall; Frederic Archer, conductor; M. Henri Marteau, soloist
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 17 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns and strings.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, that wondrous repository of information on the history of our language, traces the word "Romance" to the early 14th century, when it came to denote the vernacular tongue of France. The entry on "Romance" continues: "A tale in [French] verse embodying the adventures of some hero of chivalry, especially those of the great cycles of mediaeval legend, and belonging in matter and form to the ages of knighthood." The taste for entertaining poetry in the everyday language — as opposed to learned disquisitions in Latin — soon spread throughout Europe. By the 16th century, the term "romance" had come to include fictitious narratives in prose, and, two centuries later, was the generic name given to the incunabula of the modern novel. The elements of distant times, places and people, thickly larded with fantasy, was common to all these manifestations. "Romantic," therefore, seemed to apply appropriately to the extravagant emotionalism that began creeping into art and music late in the 18th century (the *Oxford Dictionary* defines such music as "characterized by the subordination of form to theme, and by imagination and passion"), and was to become the designation for the great age to follow.

Fourteenth-century Spain produced the earliest musical *Romances*, sophisticated settings of long stanzaic poems. In 18th-century France, the *Romance* denoted a short song of melodious character. The name was taken over into French instrumental music as the designation for some lyrical pieces of sweet sentiment. It was in this sense that Mozart applied the title "*Romanza*" to the second movement of his D minor Piano Concerto, K. 466. As Louis Biancolli noted about the addition of such a title, "Where it is used, the purpose is to show in advance that melodic invention and lyric feeling predominate." The two *Romances* for violin and orchestra by Beethoven flow from this tradition.

The *Romances* (Op. 40 in G and Op. 50 in F) probably date, respectively, from 1801-1802 and 1798. The G major was published in 1803; the F major, two years later. Though the *Romances* are simple in

expression, they require a high degree of musicianship and technical proficiency from the soloist. The celebrated Russian violin pedagogue Leopold Auer wrote that they should sound like "a tender dialogue" between soloist and orchestra, "and in keeping with this colloquial style should be played with unaffected beauty of tone and expression." Each of the *Romances* is based on a hauntingly beautiful melody presented immediately by the violin, with two intervening episodes, darker in emotional coloring, separating the full and slightly embellished returns of the main theme.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born 7 May 1833 in Hamburg; died 3 April 1897 in Vienna.

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Opus 98 (1884-1885)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Meiningen, Germany, 25 October 1885
Meiningen Court Orchestra
Johannes Brahms, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: 5 January 1906, Carnegie Music Hall; Emil Paur, conductor
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 42 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: pairs of woodwinds plus piccolo and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle and strings.

In the popular image of Brahms, he appears as a patriarch: full grey beard, rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes. He grew the beard in his late forties as, some say, a compensation for his late physical maturity — he was in his twenties before his voice changed and he needed to shave — and it seemed to be an external admission that Brahms had allowed himself to become an old man. The ideas did not seem to flow so freely as he approached the age of fifty, and he even put his publisher on notice to expect nothing more. Thankfully, the ideas did come, as they would for more than another decade, and he soon completed the superb Third Symphony. The philosophical introspection continued, however, and was reflected in many of his works. The Second Piano Concerto of 1881 is almost autumnal in its mellow ripeness; this Fourth Symphony is music of deep thoughtfulness that leads "into realms where joy and sorrow are hushed, and humanity bows before that which is eternal," wrote the eminent German musical scholar August Kretzschmar.

Brahms' Fourth Symphony is large in size and emotional impact while enormously subtle in detail. The first movement begins almost in mid-thought, as though the mood of sad melancholy pervading this opening theme had existed forever and Brahms had simply borrowed a portion of it to present musically. The movement is founded upon the tiny two-note motive (short–long) heard immediately at the beginning. Tracing this little germ cell demonstrates not only Brahms' enormous compositional skills but also the broad emotional range that he could draw from pure musical expression. To introduce the necessary contrasts into this sonata form, other themes are presented, including a broadly lyrical one for horns and cellos and a fragmented fanfare. The movement grows with a wondrous, dark majesty to its closing pages which, to Sir Donald Tovey, "bear comparison with the greatest climaxes in classical music, not excluding Beethoven."

"A funeral procession moving across moonlit heights" is how the young Richard Strauss described the second movement. Though the tonality is nominally E major, the movement opens with a stark melody, pregnant with grief, in the ancient Phrygian mode. The mood brightens, but the introspective sorrow of the beginning is never far away. Though in sonatina form (sonata without development), the movement has none of the airy sweetness of so many of Mozart's *andantes* cast in that form, but possesses rather an overriding sense of comforting tears washing away great loss. To the noted German musicologist Phillip Spitta, this was the greatest slow movement in all of the symphonic literature.

The third movement is the closest Brahms came to a true scherzo in any of his symphonies. Though such a dance-like movement may appear antithetical to the tragic nature of the Symphony, this scherzo is actually a necessary contrast within the work's total structure, since it serves to heighten the pathos of the surrounding movements, especially the granitic splendor of the finale. Brahms, as always, took great care with the deployment of his orchestral resources, and he emphasized the singular brightness of this movement by calling for the silvery tingle of the triangle — its only appearance anywhere in his symphonies.

The finale is a passacaglia — a series of variations on a short, recurring melody. The passacaglia was a compositional technique highly favored by Baroque composers that fell into disuse with the changed requirements of the music of the Classical era. It had never been used in a symphony before this one, and it reflects both Brahms' interest in the music of earlier eras and his faith in the inexorable expressive powers of the old formal types. The theme, to which Brahms added a single chromatic note, was taken from Bach's Cantata No. 150, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* ("*I Long for Thee, Lord*"), though John Horton has made a convincing argument that the form was influenced by François Couperin and Georg Muffat. Pedantry was not Brahms' point here, but it is essential to understanding his style to realize that he was familiar with this old music (from his own study and as an editor for several fledgling musicological series) and could draw whatever resources from it he needed to vivify his works. There are some thirty continuous variations in the finale, though it is less important to follow them individually than to feel the massive strength given to the movement by this technique. The opening chorale-like statement, in which trombones are heard for the first time in the Symphony, recurs twice as a further supporting pillar in the unification of the movement. Yet Brahms never lost sight of the central aesthetic of the Symphony, and his friend Elizabeth von Herzogenberg wrote to him, with no little wonder, "Who can resist an emotion strong enough to penetrate all that skillful elaboration?"

In his biography of the composer, Peter Latham wrote of this stirring work, "Before the end we have risen altogether out of sight of the shady valleys of the *Andante* and the cheerful merriment of the scherzo, and the wind roars unmercifully over the stony slabs of the mountain-side [of the finale]. It is an awesome heart-searching experience, a mighty assertion of the spirit of man."

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