



Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2023-2024 Grand Classics Series

FRIDAY, October 6, 2023 AT 8:00 P.M.
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2023 AT 2:30 P.M.

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

JOHN ADAMS

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

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born February 15, 1947, in Worcester, Massachusetts

PREMIERE OF WORK

- June 13, 1986; Great Woods Music Festival; Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Michael Tilson Thomas, conductor

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- June 12, 2016; Heinz Hall; Giancarlo Guerrero, conductor

INSTRUMENTATION

- Two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, four clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two synthesizers, and strings

DURATION

- 5 minutes

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 Royal Academy of Music (London), 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. In June 2023, the Library of Congress announced that it was acquiring Adams' manuscripts and papers for its Music Division, where they join those of such other eminent American performing artists as Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, George and Ira Gershwin, Martha Graham, Charles Mingus and Neil Simon.

For the recording of *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* by the San Francisco Symphony on Nonesuch Records, Michael Steinberg, the distinguished critic and program annotator who was closely associated with John Adams and his music, 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, 13 June 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."

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D minor, WoO 23 (1853)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born June 8, 1810; in Zwickau, Germany; Died July 29, 1856 in Endenich, Germany

PREMIERE OF WORK

- November 26, 1937; Berlin; Karl Böhm, conductor; Georg Kulenkampff, soloist

PSO PREMIERE

- October 6, 2023; Heinz Hall; Manfred Honeck, conductor; David McCarroll, soloist
- These performances mark the PSO Premiere of Schumann's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

INSTRUMENTATION

- Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

DURATION

- 32 minutes

In September 1850, Schumann became Music Director for the city of Düsseldorf, where his duties included conducting the orchestra's subscription concerts, leading performances of church music, giving private music lessons, organizing a chamber music society, and composing as time allowed. Things went well at first and Schumann enjoyed one of his most creative periods in Düsseldorf, but before long the situation turned sour. His fragile mental health, his ineptitude as a conductor, and his frequent irritability created a rift with the musicians, and the orchestra's governing body presented him with the suggestion that, perhaps, his time would be better devoted entirely to composition. Schumann, increasingly unstable though at first determined to stay, complained to his wife, Clara, that he was being cruelly treated. Proceedings were begun by the orchestra committee to relieve him of his position, but his resignation in October 1853 ended the matter. By early the next year, Schumann's reason had completely given way. On February 27th, he tried to drown himself in the Rhine, and a week later he was committed to an asylum in Endenich, near Bonn, where he lingered with fleeting moments of sanity for nearly two-and-a-half years. His faithful Clara was there with him when he

died on July 29, 1856, at the age of 46.

Among the products of Schumann's last, sad months in Düsseldorf was the Violin Concerto, composed in just two weeks in late September 1853 at the suggestion of his friend Joseph Joachim, one of the era's greatest virtuosos. Schumann had expected the premiere to be given in Düsseldorf by Joachim, but his resignation the following month scotched that plan, so the violinist arranged a read-through of the Concerto with the Hanover Orchestra, where he was concertmaster, for January 1854. It did not go well. "There are wonderful things in the first and second movements," Joachim judged, "but the finale is horribly difficult." In 1858, Joachim tried out the piece privately for Johannes Brahms (who was to write a magnificent concerto for Joachim in 1878), and both of them, concerned that the composer's mental instability at the time he wrote the work might have affected the quality of the music, decided not to include it in the collected edition of Schumann's works Brahms was then preparing. Joachim never played the piece publicly, but he did keep the manuscript, which came into the archives of the Prussian State Library after his death, in 1907, with the proviso that it not be played or published before the 100th anniversary of Schumann's death (July 29, 1956).

Joachim's restriction remained in place (and the Violin Concerto little more than a catalog entry) until 1937, when the Nazis, who had banned performances of music by all Jewish composers, saw propaganda value in the piece as an (Aryan) substitute for the beloved but then-forbidden Violin Concerto of Felix Mendelssohn. German musicologist Georg Schünemann, recently appointed by the Nazis as head of the Prussian State Library, unearthed the score and had it published by Schott over the objections of Eugenie, the Schumanns' last surviving child. Schott sent an advance copy to the 21-year-old American-British violinist Yehudi Menuhin with a proposal that he play the premiere. The Nazis, however, absolutely forbid his participation because of his Jewish ancestry, and hastily arranged an "official" premiere — November 26, 1937 by violinist Georg Kulenkampff, conductor Karl Böhm and the Berlin Philharmonic — as a political event. Hitler attended, Joseph Goebbels gave a speech, and the concert was recorded for broadcast across Germany. Menuhin played the first American performances of the Concerto at New York's Carnegie Hall (with piano accompaniment) on December 5, 1937, and, with orchestra, on December 23rd with the St. Louis Symphony and conductor Vladimir Golschmann; he recorded the work for RCA Victor with John Barbirolli and the New York Philharmonic in February 1938. With lingering concerns over the effect of Schumann's mental state on the work as well as the Nazi-ordered manner of its premiere, the Concerto failed to enter the standard repertory until scattered performances and recordings — Szeryng in 1964, Kremer in 1983, Zehetmair in 1989 — led to its re-evaluation and increasing presence in the concert hall. With the publication of a critical edition in 2009 and numerous recordings and performances, Robert Schumann's Violin Concerto is, very belatedly, becoming a regular part of concert life.

The Concerto's first movement follows classical formal precedent: an orchestral introduction presenting a dramatic main theme and a songful second subject in a brighter key; the soloist's elaboration of those two melodic elements; a development section that permutes both themes; and a recapitulation of the earlier themes capped by a coda leading to an emphatic close. The second movement is an intermezzo based on a tender theme with subtle rhythmic shifts shared between violin and solo cello. (In 1958, Benjamin Britten arranged this movement as *Elegy* for Violin and String Orchestra in memory of the great British horn virtuoso Dennis Brain. Yehudi Menuhin, appropriately, conducted the premiere in London in June 1958.) The music proceeds directly to the finale, a bracing sonata-rondo in the style of a polonaise and a display of flamboyant virtuosity for the soloist.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92 (1811-1812)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn; Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna

PREMIERE OF WORK

- December 8, 1813; Vienna; Ludwig Van Beethoven, conductor

PSO PREMIERE

- January 6, 18989; Carnegie Music Hall; Frederick Archer, conductor;

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- August 31, 2017; Wolkenturm, Grafenegg, Austria; Manfred Honeck, conductor

INSTRUMENTATION

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

DURATION

- 36 minutes

In the autumn of 1813, Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, the inventor of the metronome, approached Beethoven with the proposal that the two organize a concert to benefit the soldiers wounded at the recent Battle of Hanau — with, perhaps, two or three repetitions of the concert to benefit themselves. Beethoven was eager to have his as-yet-unheard A major Symphony of the preceding year performed, and thought the financial reward worth the trouble, so he agreed. The concert consisted of this “Entirely New Symphony” by Beethoven, marches by Dussek and Pleyel performed on a “Mechanical Trumpeter” fabricated by Mälzel, and an orchestral arrangement of *Wellington’s Victory*, a piece Beethoven had concocted the previous summer for yet another of Mälzel’s musical machines, the clangorous “Panharmonicon.” The evening was such a success that Beethoven’s first biographer, Anton Schindler, reported, “All persons, however they had previously dissented from his music, now agreed to award him his laurels.”

The orchestra for that important occasion included some of the most distinguished musicians and composers of the day: Spohr, Schuppanzigh, Dragonetti, Meyerbeer, Hummel and Salieri all lent their talents. Spohr, who played among the violins, left an account of Beethoven as conductor. “Beethoven had accustomed himself to indicate expression to the orchestra by all manner of singular bodily movements,” wrote Spohr. “So often as a *sforzando* [a sudden, strong attack] occurred, he thrust apart his arms, which he had previously crossed upon his breast. At *piano* [soft] he crouched down lower and lower as he desired the degree of softness. If a *crescendo* [gradually louder] then entered, he slowly rose again, and at the entrance of the *forte* [loud] jumped into the air. Sometimes, too, he unconsciously shouted to strengthen the *forte*.”

The Seventh Symphony is a magnificent creation in which Beethoven displayed several technical innovations that were to have a profound influence on the music of the 19th century: he expanded the scope of symphonic structure through the use of more distant tonal areas; he brought an unprecedented richness and range to the orchestral palette; and he gave a new awareness of rhythm as the vitalizing force in music. It is particularly the last of these characteristics that most immediately affects the listener, and to which commentators have consistently turned to explain the vibrant power of the work. Perhaps the most famous such observation about the Seventh Symphony is that of Richard Wagner, who called the work “the apotheosis of the Dance in its highest aspect ... the loftiest deed of bodily motion incorporated in an ideal world of tone.” Couching his observation in less highfalutin language, John N. Burk believed that its rhythm gave this work a feeling of immense grandeur incommensurate with its relatively short forty-minute length. “Beethoven,” Burk explained, “seems to have built up this impression by willfully driving a single rhythmic figure through each movement, until the music attains (particularly in the body of the first movement and in the Finale) a swift propulsion, an effect of cumulative growth which is akin to extraordinary size.”

A slow introduction, almost a movement in itself, opens the Symphony. This initial section employs two themes: the first, majestic and unadorned, is passed down through the winds while being punctuated by long, rising scales in the strings; the second is a graceful melody for oboe. The transition to the main part of the first movement is accomplished by the superbly controlled reiteration of a single pitch. This device not only connects the introduction with the exposition but also establishes the dactylic rhythm that dominates the movement.

The *Allegretto* scored such a success at its premiere that it was immediately encored, a phenomenon virtually unprecedented for a slow movement. Indeed, this music was so popular that it was used to replace the brief slow movement of the Eighth Symphony at several performances during Beethoven's lifetime. In form, the movement is a series of variations on the heartbeat rhythm of its opening measures. In spirit, however, it is more closely allied to the austere chaconne of the Baroque era than to the light, figural variations of Classicism.

The third movement, a study in contrasts of sonority and dynamics, is built on the formal model of the scherzo, but expanded to include a repetition of the horn-dominated Trio (Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo).

In the sonata-form finale, Beethoven not only produced music of virtually unmatched rhythmic energy ("a triumph of Bacchic fury," in the words of Sir Donald Tovey), but did it in such a manner as to exceed the climaxes of the earlier movements and make it the goal toward which they had all been aimed. So intoxicating is this music that some of Beethoven's contemporaries were sure he had composed it in a drunken frenzy. An encounter with the Seventh Symphony is a heady experience. Klaus G. Roy, the distinguished musicologist and program annotator for The Cleveland Orchestra, wrote, "Many a listener has come away from a hearing of this Symphony in a state of being punch-drunk. Yet it is an intoxication without a hangover, a dope-like exhilaration without decadence." To which the composer's own words may be added. "I am Bacchus incarnate," boasted Beethoven, "appointed to give humanity wine to drown its sorrow.... He who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world."