Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2018-2019 Mellon Grand Classics Season

June 14 and 16, 2019

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR
IGOR LEVIT, PIANO

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Concerto No. 21 in C major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 467

I. Allegro maestoso
II. Andante
III. Allegro vivace assai

Mr. Levit

Intermission

RICHARD STRAUSS

Eine Alpensinfonie, Opus 64

Night — Sunrise — The Ascent — Entry into the Forest — Wandering by the Brook — By the Waterfall — Apparition — Flowery Meadows — In the Mountain Pasture — Through Thicket and Undergrowth by the Wrong Way — On the Glacier — Dangerous Moments — On the Summit — Vision — Mists Arise — The Sun Gradually Becomes Obscured — Elegy — Calm Before the Storm — Thunder and Storm, Descent — Sunset — Epilogue — Night

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Concerto No. 21 in C major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 467 (1785)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna on December 5, 1791. He composed his Piano Concerto No. 21 in 1785, and it was premiered at the National Court Theater in Vienna with Mozart as soloist on March 9, 1785. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the Concerto at Syria Mosque with conductor Antonio Modarelli and pianist Walter Gieseking in February 1932, and most recently performed it with music director Manfred Honeck and pianist Lars Vogt in November 2008. The score calls for flute, pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings. Performance time: approximately 31 minutes.

"We never go to bed before one o'clock and I never get up before nine.... Every day there are concerts; and the whole time is given up to teaching, music, composing and so forth. I feel rather out of it all." Father Leopold Mozart had reached a rather brittle 66th year when he sent these lines off to his daughter, Maria Anna, from Vienna on March 12, 1785, just two days after Wolfgang had premiered his C major Piano Concerto (K. 467) at the Court Theater. Leopold had ventured from Salzburg to the busy Austrian capital city to visit Wolfgang and his wife, and to check on their growing brood, including the most recent addition — Karl Thomas, born the preceding September. (Mozart had six children in the nine years of his marriage; only two survived him.)

Leopold wrote to Maria Anna that the new C major Concerto had an excellent reception at its first performance on March 10th. The applause, he allowed, was "deafening," and the audience was even moved to tears. Amid the acclaim, however, the sensitive, professional musician in Leopold sensed a disturbing element in much of his son's recent music. He felt that this Concerto was not only "astonishingly difficult," but that it also held an expressive undercurrent which would not continue to please the Viennese public. The deeply felt emotionalism of the D minor Concerto (K. 466), completed only three weeks before this one, was proving to be not simply an experiment or a temporary aberration, but an integral element in Mozart's mature style. As time passed, the Viennese, like Leopold, were bewildered by this music and its incipient Romanticism, and the success of 1785 soon faded. Mozart composed three more piano concertos in the following year, but then his subscribers melted away. No longer able to secure support for his own concerts, the need for concertos evaporated, and he wrote only two more during his last five years. By 1785 Mozart was composing his most important works to please only his own Muse. That he did so proved to be a tragedy for him but a treasure for us.

"The first movement [of the C major Concerto]," wrote Abraham Veinus, "is in truth majestic. The orchestra has breadth and grandeur, the solo part dignity and brilliance, and the movement as a whole is anchored in a kind of firm and magnificent pride." Its orchestral introduction opens with a soft, martial strain for unison strings answered by the winds. Other themes follow in abundance before the entry of the soloist who accompanies the return of the martial melody as the main theme of the exposition. A brief excursion into the shadowy key of G minor by the pianist leads to the second theme in the bright, expected G major. Alfred Einstein estimated that the development, "with its modulations through darkness to light, is one of the most beautiful examples of Mozart's iridescent harmony and of the breadth of the domain embraced in his conception of C major." The unison strings tiptoe in once again with the martial theme to begin the recapitulation.

The *Andante* is one of Mozart's most sensually beautiful creations. The muted strings, the pulsating triplet rhythms of the accompaniment that gently oppose the meter of the melody, the exquisite scoring, and the rich harmonic palette fill this music with a dreamlike quality. The sparkling rondo-finale joins the rollicking spirit of the opera buffa and the intensity and wealth of expression of the symphony with the virtuoso elements of the concerto.

RICHARD STRAUSS

Eine Alpensinfonie ("*An Alpine Symphony*"), Opus 64 (1911, 1914-1915)

Richadr Strauss was born in Munich on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on September 8, 1949. He composed his *Alpine Symphony* in 1911 and 1914-1915, and it was premiered in Berlin by the Dresden Court Orchestra with Strauss conducting on October 28, 1915. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the Symphony at Heinz Hall with music director André Previn in February 1978, and most recently performed it with conductor Marek Janowski in November 2008. The score calls for quadruple woodwinds plus two piccolos, English horn, Heckelphone (baritone oboe), piccolo clarinet, bass clarinet and contrabassoon, four horns, four tenor tubas, four trumpets, four trombones, two bass tubas, two timpanists, percussion, two harps, organ and celesta, and strings; and an off-stage contingent of seven horns, two trumpets and two trombones. Performance time: approximately 53 minutes.

Strauss was born and raised in Bavaria, lived in the region for most of his life, and ultimately settled in the lovely twin-towns of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, tucked beneath the northern face of the massive Zugspitze. As a teenager, he once went on an Alpine climb with a local group of hikers. The party lost its way during the ascent and was overtaken and drenched to the skin by storms on the way down. Strauss wrote to his friend Ludwig Thuille (a composer and later professor of composition at the Munich Conservatory) that he had found the experience so exhilarating that he was inspired to improvise some musical impressions of the climb at the piano: "Naturally it conjured up a lot of nonsense and giant Wagnerian tone-painting." It was not until 1900, more than two decades later, that Strauss again broached the subject of his mountain music. Soon after finishing *Ein Heldenleben*, he wrote to his parents that he was considering a tone poem "which would begin with a sunrise in Switzerland. Otherwise so far only the idea (love-tragedy of an artist) and a few themes exist." It was just at that time, however, that his creative energy shifted from the concert hall to the opera stage, and, except for his 1904 paean to life among the pots and pans, the *Symphonia Domestica*, all of his compositions for the next dozen years were operas.

Der Rosenkavalier was premiered with great success at Dresden on January 26, 1911, and Strauss was eager to follow it quickly with other stage works. However, his librettist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, was a meticulous and thoughtful writer who found it impossible to produce a new book on such short notice. Since Strauss was not one to take potential inactivity sitting down (he called the Oboe Concerto and the Duet-Concertino, composed when he was in his eighties, "wrist exercises ... to prevent my right wrist from going to sleep prematurely"), he sketched out a fifty-minute *Alpine Symphony* early in 1911, "though," he confessed, "it gives me less pleasure than shaking maybugs off trees." Despite such initial reluctance, however, much of the new work was sketched during the spring and early summer before he turned to the composition of incidental music for Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,* which five years later grew into the iridescent opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Strauss occasionally tinkered with the *Symphony* during the following years, but did no serious further work on it until November 1914, when Hofmannsthal was (again) keeping him waiting for the final act of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. The polishing and orchestration of *Eine Alpensinfonie* took exactly 100 days; the work was completed on February 8, 1915. Except for the *Japanische Festmusik* of 1940, a political potboiler celebrating the 2,600th anniversary of the Japanese Empire, it was to be his last composition for large orchestra.

For the *Symphony*'s premiere, Strauss enlisted his favorite ensemble, the Dresden Court Orchestra, and conducted them in a concert in Berlin on October 28, 1915. In gratitude for their having given the first performances of four of the six operas he had written to that time, Strauss dedicated the score to the orchestra and its director, Count Nicolaus Seebach. The work was first heard in America just six months later, when Stokowski used it as one of the blockbuster pieces (along with Mahler's Eighth Symphony) that launched his tenure as conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Strauss regarded *Eine Alpensinfonie* as one of his best works, and he conducted it whenever management assented to hire sufficient players; he requested (unsuccessfully) that it be included on his first post-World War II concert outside Germany, in London. When he crossed the German border in 1945 to take a rest cure in Switzerland after the war, he presented the frontier commander, a French officer, with the manuscript score as a prized trophy showing his respect for the nation of France (Strauss had received the Legion of Honor rosette many years before); the autograph is still in the French National Library.

Two of the outstanding musical features of *Eine Alpensinfonie* are the size of its orchestra and the specificity of its programmatic reference. Strauss here asked for a total of more than 100 players, including quadruple winds and brasses, an organ, a large string section and such instrumental exotica as a

Heckelphone (a large baritone oboe that the noted German instrumental maker Wilhelm Heckel [whose family perfected the key mechanism of the bassoon] developed at the request of Richard Wagner for an instrument combining "something of the character of the oboe with the mellow but powerful sound of the alphorn"; Strauss also used it in *Salome* and *Elektra*), tenor tubas, cow bells and clever percussion contraptions to mimic the sounds of wind and thunder. To assist the wind players in sustaining their long notes (Strauss had been challenging the breath control of the woodwinds and brasses with the notational admonition "*aushalten!*" since at least *Till Eulenspiegel*), he suggested they use the *Aerophor* (mistakenly given as "*Aerophon*" in the score), invented in 1911 by one Bernhard Samuels of Schwerin. By means of a tube, this device could supply air from a small bellows operated by the musician's foot to the mouthpiece to sustain a tone indefinitely. (Samuels patented this curiosity in 1912.) In addition to the musicians on stage, Strauss also required a battalion of twenty horns and pairs of trumpets and trombones to sound hunting calls in the wings during the *Ascent* section of the *Symphony*. Such an effect, while unusual, was not, however, unprecedented. Ardent Wagnerian disciple that he was, Strauss could solicit as example the twelve off-stage horns in both *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan*, as well as the twelve additional trumpets plus some two dozen other players required for *Lohengrin*. Strauss is reported to have said at the dress rehearsal for the premiere, "At last I have learned to orchestrate."

Eine Alpensinfonie is concerned with a period of 24 hours upon the mountain. The work opens with the shimmering stillness of *Night*, depicted by a descending scale evolving from a unison B-flat; every note of the scale is sustained to create a luminous curtain of harmony. The trombones and tuba present the theme of the mountain, a simple, craggy motive built around the most fundamental notes of the harmonic series. (Strauss received some criticism at the work's premiere for the diatonic simplicity of its themes. He said that their plainness was intentional and natural: "I wanted to compose for once as a cow gives milk.") The orchestra stirs, and mounts an enormous crescendo while the brasses give out fanfares built from the mountain theme to prepare for *Sunrise*, a climactic moment ingeniously derived from the descending scale of *Night*.

The Ascent commences with an energetic, wide-ranging theme that rises through the strings into the body of the orchestra. A blast of hunters' horns in the distance marks the *Entry into the Forest*. A lugubrious theme in the horns and trombones suggests dense foliage, from which float the songs of birds. The ascent resumes, and the climber finds himself *Wandering by the Brook*, which, upstream, leads to a *Waterfall*. The music suggests a striking panorama. In the mist above the whirlpool appears an *Apparition*, perhaps the Fairy of the Alps that, according to legend, has inhabited those mountains since ancient times. It was the spirit that haunted Lord Byron's Manfred and served as the catalyst for the scherzo of the fine symphony inspired from Tchaikovsky by Byron's poem.

Climbing above the waterfall, the traveler comes first to *Flowery Meadows* and then to *The Mountain Pasture*, where he is greeted with the sounds of cowbells and the yodels of the herdsmen. The horn gives forth a lovely bit of pastoral lyricism before the climber goes *Through Thicket and Undergrowth by the Wrong Way*, only to emerge *On the Glacier*, depicted by a fanfare-like theme of short–long rhythms. Crossing the ice, the traveler has some *Dangerous Moments* before he arrives *On the Summit*. The magnificent sight has almost taken his breath away (a halting, tentative theme in the oboe), but its grandeur soon floods over him and he experiences a *Vision*. The sun has passed its zenith for the day, however, and *Mists Arise* (rustlings and long scales in the strings). Quickly, *The Sun Gradually Becomes Obscured*. There is a brief *Elegy* (a long, unison melody in the strings), which is interrupted by the *Calm Before the Storm*. The traveler contends with violent *Thunder and Storm* during his *Descent*. The storm breaks in time to reveal the day's *Sunset*, and *Eine Alpensinfonie* closes with an introspective *Epilogue* and the return of *Night*.