



NATIONAL FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
BRAHMS' SECOND SYMPHONY

ROSSEN MILANOV, conductor
SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 2015 . 8PM
ELSIE & MARVIN DEKELBOUM CONCERT HALL

PROGRAM

Henri Dutilleux

Métaboles

Incantatoire —
Linéaire —
Obsessionnel —
Torpide —
Flamboyant —

Richard Strauss

Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*

- *intermission* -

Johannes Brahms

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73
Allegro non troppo
Adagio non troppo
Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino)
Allegro con spirito

Métaboles

HENRI DUTILLEUX

Born January 22, 1916, Angers, France
Died May 22, 2013, Paris

Dutilleux composed Métaboles under a commission from the Cleveland Orchestra, which gave the premiere on January 14, 1965, with George Szell conducting. The work is scored for a large orchestra: 2 piccolos, 2 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, 2 B-flat clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp and strings. In the battery, which requires five players in addition to the timpanist, are xylophones, glockenspiel, triangle, cow-bell, 2 temple blocks, snare drum, 3 tom-toms, bass drum, crash cymbals, suspended cymbal, Chinese cymbal and both medium and large tam-tams. Duration, 16 minutes.

Like his illustrious musical compatriots Maurice Ravel and Paul Dukas, Henri Dutilleux early on developed the demanding self-criticism that led him to work painstakingly and unhurriedly in creating and refining each composition — and to reject or discard several scores he never brought to completion. He thus became known for producing about a dozen major works in some six decades, each of them exemplifying his solid craftsmanship and rich imaginativeness. His music was championed in our area by the famous cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, during his years as conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra. Slava, for whom Dutilleux composed his cello concerto *Tout und monde lointain*, commissioned the orchestral *Timbres, espace, mouvement* for his first season as music director of the NSO, and that work actually had three premieres in Washington: Rostropovich conducted the first of its three sections in January 1978; he gave the premiere of the complete work the following November, and introduced the revised version in September 1991. Dutilleux's *Correspondances*, an orchestral song cycle with texts drawn from letters (one of them from the famous writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn to Rostropovich himself and his wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya) was performed in Slava's last appearances with the NSO, in April 2006, with Dawn Upshaw, the soprano who had introduced the work in Berlin three years earlier.

Métaboles, by now the most frequently performed of Dutilleux's orchestral works, was commissioned and introduced by another American orchestra, in this case the Cleveland Orchestra, on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary. The anniversary season was 1957–58, but Dutilleux did not complete his score until 1964, and, as already noted, the premiere was given in Severance Hall early the following year.

The title Dutilleux chose for this work comes from classical rhetoric: it signifies “transition,” or “a passing from one thing to another” — as the five contrasting moods reflected in this music pass from one to another. The composer advised, “This term of rhetoric, adopted with regard to musical forms, unveils the thought of the author of these five pieces to present one or several ideas in a different order or under different aspects, until they undergo, by successive stages, a true change of nature. The process of *métabole* occurs within each of the pieces, while applying at the same time to the work as a whole. ... In conceiving this work the composer did not cease to muse upon the mysterious and fascinating world of eternal metamorphosis.”

While Dutilleux specified that the “music is not dictated by any literary programme,” he did affix descriptive subtitles to the five pieces, which are linked together, the main theme undergoing (again in the composer's own words) “successive transformations, as in ... the domain of variations.” The first piece INCANTATORY (*Largamente*), is in the nature of a rondo, with woodwinds predominating. The second, LINEAR (*Lento moderato*), “represents the aspects of a *Lied* ... sovereignty of the strings, with more and more numerous divisions of the string quartet.” The third, OBSESSIVE (*Scherzando*), “follows strictly the pattern of a passacaglia,” with the brass in the forefront. The fourth, TORPID (*Andantino*), features the “almost exclusive employment of the percussion, with added touches of brass, harp, celesta, clarinet and bass clarinet, and the double basses treated in harmonics.” The concluding section, FLAMBOYANT (*Presto*), is a scherzo exhibiting “dialogues, opposition or blending of these different groups.”

Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born June 11, 1864, Munich
Died September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Strauss composed his opera Der Rosenkavalier (“The Cavalier of the Rose”), to a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in 1910; the premiere was given at the Dresden Court Opera on January 26, 1911, with Ernst von Schuch conducting. The suite performed this evening was put together by Artur Rodzinski, who conducted its first performance in a concert of the New York Philharmonic on October 5, 1944.

The score for the suite, published in 1945, calls for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, glockenspiel, celesta, 2 harps and strings. Duration, 22 minutes.

The Bavarian Richard Strauss was not related to Johann Strauss, the Viennese Waltz King, but he admired him profoundly, and their careers overlapped for a dozen years or so at the end of the 19th century. Johann Strauss was at the height of his fame at the time the young Richard began to make a name for himself (*Don Juan*, the first of his great tone poems, was given its premiere in the same year as Johann's *Emperor Waltz*, 1889), and *Der Rosenkavalier* would not have come into being if its composer had not known and loved the waltzes of the Viennese Strausses.

There are some intriguing parallels, or near-parallels, to be noted in the careers of Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss. Both turned to writing for the stage only after establishing themselves in the orchestral realm — Johann after being crowned the Waltz King, Richard after producing his remarkable chain of symphonic poems. Both were also conspicuously active as conductors. Johann Strauss did not confine himself exclusively to dance music in that role, but conducted his orchestra in the Viennese premieres of works by Liszt and Wagner when the Establishment either lacked the courage to do so or reneged on a commitment. Richard, too, went far beyond his own compositions in his conducting repertory; he was especially admired for his Mozart, in both the concert hall and the opera house, and it is to that

composer, perhaps even more than the Waltz King, that *Der Rosenkavalier* is an affectionate tribute, with *The Marriage of Figaro* as the most likely model. It is significant that Strauss set his opera in the city associated with both Mozart and the Johann Strauss dynasty, and where he himself was to serve for a time as director of the Vienna Opera. By a happy coincidence, the premiere, in Dresden, fell on the eve of Mozart's 155th birthday.

Such a work, in any event, was just what Strauss needed to reassure his public in the wake of the minor scandals generated by his *Salome* and the fierce drama of his *Elektra*. The latter was his first collaboration with Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the librettist who was to him the kind of collaborator Lorenzo da Ponte had been to Mozart; *Der Rosenkavalier* was their second joint effort, set not in bleak antiquity but in the Vienna of Maria Theresia, the empress who died in 1780, a year before Mozart settled there. The chief character is not the title role but the Marschallin, who is herself named Marie-Thérèse, and who in some respects may remind us of the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Like Cherubino in that opera, Octavian, the young hero (the *Rosenkavalier* himself), is a *Hosenrolle*, a male character portrayed by a female singer. If the Strauss opera is more voluptuous, more opulent and even more rife with intrigue than *Figaro*, it is also a bit more indulgent in its view of human weakness in affairs of the heart. Even its cynicism is served up *mit Schlag*, ornamented and sweetened with waltz rhythms that, far from striking us as anachronistic, actually seem to give the work a sort of fairyland timelessness.

One of these waltzes — the one associated with Baron Ochs — was apparently borrowed by Richard Strauss from the waltz *Geheime Anziehungskräfte* ("Secret Magnetic Forces," known also as *Dynamiden*), by Johann's younger brother Josef Strauss, and the first motif heard in the opera's prelude was apparently adapted from the same composer's waltz *Delirien*. There is a further, extramusical connection with the Waltz King, in the character of Octavian, whose family name is specified as Rofrano, a name taken from the annals of actual Viennese aristocracy and so well known that it was given to a street in Vienna: the Rofranogasse, the very street on which Johann Strauss himself lived for several years.

Such connections and allusions more than intimate that *Der Rosenkavalier* was a labor of love on its composer's part, and Strauss indeed had a special place in his heart for this work to the end of his life. When a group of American soldiers came to his door in Garmisch at the end of the European war in 1945, he greeted them with the simple statement, "I am Dr. Richard Strauss, the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*."

There have been several orchestral suites drawn from *Der Rosenkavalier*. One was prepared by Strauss himself, based on a curious film version of the opera, a *silent* film made in 1926 and shown with recorded music. Another suite was created by the brilliant conductor Antal Doráti (Rostropovich's predecessor on the podium of the National Symphony Orchestra), whose own enthusiasm for the Viennese Strausses is documented in the form of his score for the ballet *Graduation Ball*, based entirely on their dance pieces. The very successful suite performed in the present concerts was arranged by another celebrated conductor, Artur Rodzinski, whose name, however, does not appear on the score; this version was given the composer's blessing, and has been a repertory staple for some 70 years now.

The opera's dominant personality is that of the Marschallin, even though she makes no appearance from the end of Act I to the middle of Act III. In this orchestral suite, however, the emphasis is more on youth and its joys, with little reference to age and its sacrifices. Here we follow the title character, the young Octavian, from the Marschallin's boudoir to his meeting with the young Sophie — to whom he is to present the silver rose as a token of her engagement to his kinsman Baron Ochs — and then the comic encounters with the Baron himself, the Marschallin's gracious gesture of resignation and the final ecstatic duet of Sophie and Octavian, "*Ist ein Traum*." The specific portions of the opera represented are the Prelude to Act I, the Presentation of the Silver Rose, the Arrival of Ochs and Waltzes from Act II, and the Trio, Duet and Great Waltz from Act III.

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897, Vienna

Brahms began work on his Second Symphony in the summer of 1877 and completed the score in time for the illustrious conductor Hans Richter to introduce the work with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra on December 30 of that year. The orchestra specified in the score comprises flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons in pairs; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings. Duration, 40 minutes.

After working off and on for some 20 years to produce what eventually became his First Symphony in 1876, Brahms was so heartened by the huge success of that work that he was able to compose his Second swiftly and almost effortlessly in the following year. Where the First had been laboriously hewn from granite, the Second seemed to bloom as spontaneously as a spring blossom in a forest glade. Its genial, outgoing character, among other factors, sets it apart from Brahms' three other symphonies; this is the one that might be regarded as his "pastoral" symphony, and it is surely the most directly endearing of the four.

Brahms tried to conceal this geniality from the Viennese public up to the time of the work's premiere, even remarking that he ought to wear a black armband "in deference to the solemn and mournful nature of my latest child."

While some musical analysts have taken him at his word and have gone to great lengths to show the Second as a "tragic" symphony (the conductor Artur Rodzinski, mentioned in the foregoing note on the *Rosenkavalier* Suite, was one who felt "great tragedy" in this music), the very opening of the work assures us that the composer was only having one of his little jokes, for it establishes at once an ingratiatingly pastoral mood. The radiant second theme is one of Brahms' characteristic outpourings of warm contentment, reminiscent of his beloved "Cradle Song" and the Waltz in A-flat for piano. The first theme is subjected to fugal treatment in the development; new motifs spun off by variations in the rhythm are hailed and dismissed by clipped comments from the brass, and after its vigorous course has been

run the movement ends even more tenderly than it began.

The serious mood of the second movement has been cited in support of the “tragic” interpretation of the Symphony, but “solemn” and “meditative” — terms that do characterize this music — are hardly synonyms for “tragic.” There is a certain melancholy vein here, which deepens with the appearance of the hymn-like second theme, but it is only in the second half of the movement that the basic tranquility is disturbed briefly by a passing storm — and storms, by long established tradition, are hardly out of place in “pastoral” works.

This basic element is emphasized on a simpler level in the third movement, a bucolic intermezzo of almost naïve charm and intimacy. The scoring is lighter here than in the rest of the work, and the unexpectedly animated middle section serves to heighten the ingratiating effect of the easygoing *Allegretto* that enwraps it. At the work’s premiere, the delighted Viennese audience demanded and got a repetition of this movement.

Following the energetic but consciously restrained opening of the final movement, its first theme is restated in an exultant orchestral outburst and then, the way cleared by the good-naturedly crackling and snarling winds, the broad second theme makes its entrance in lambent sunset colors. The music builds confidently to the invigorating coda in which the second theme is transformed into a blazing fanfare, ending the symphony on a note of sheer exhilaration virtually unparalleled among Brahms’ major works. The conclusions of his First and Fourth symphonies are monumental, that of the Third touchingly elegiac; that of the Second simply abounds in joy — black armband to the contrary notwithstanding.

Notes by Richard Freed © 2015