



Terry Linke

Tuesday, March 7, 2023, 7:30pm
Zellerbach Hall

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Christian Thielemann, *principal conductor*

PROGRAM 1

Arnold SCHOENBERG (1874–1951) *Verklärte Nacht* for string orchestra,
Op. 4 (1917)

INTERMISSION

Richard STRAUSS (1864–1949) *Eine Alpensinfonie*, Op. 64 (1911–1915)

Nacht (Night) – Sonnenaufgang (Sunrise) –
Der Anstieg (The Ascent) – Eintritt in den Wald
(Entrance into the Forest) – Wanderung neben dem
Bache (Wandering by the Brook) – Am Wasserfall
(At the Waterfall) – Erscheinung (Apparition) –
Auf blumigen Wiesen (On Flowering Meadows) –
Auf der Alm (On the Alpine Pasture) – Durch
Dickicht und Gestrüpp auf Irrwegen (Through
Thickets and Undergrowth on the Wrong Path) –
Auf dem Gletscher (On the Glacier) – Gefährvolle
Augenblicke (Dangerous Moments) – Auf dem
Gipfel (On the Summit) – Vision (Vision) – Nebel
steigen auf (Mists Rise) – Die Sonne verdüstert sich
allmählich (The Sun Gradually Becomes Obscured) –
Elegie (Elegy) – Stille vor dem Sturm (Calm Before
the Storm) – Gewitter und Sturm, Abstieg
(Thunderstorm and Tempest, Descent) –
Sonnenuntergang (Sunset) – Ausklang (After Tones) –
Nacht (Night)

This performance is made possible, in part, by Nadine Tang.



Arnold Schoenberg

Verklärte Nacht for string orchestra, Op. 4

When Arnold Schoenberg created his remarkable sextet *Verklärte Nacht* (or *Transfigured Night*) in 1899, program music—or music inspired by extra-musical stories or images—was dominating European music. In a culture obsessed with Wagner’s music dramas and Richard Strauss’ tone poems, chamber music had remained the last bastion in which composers could still concern themselves with purely musical issues without poetic or philosophical embellishment.

Inspired by the poetry of his contemporary Richard Demel, the 25-year-old Schoenberg finally carried the spirit of program music into the world of chamber music, after first setting eight Demel poems as songs. When the poet wrote to Schoenberg to express his delight after hearing a performance of *Transfigured Night*, the composer responded: “Your poems have had a decisive influence on my development as a composer. They were what first made me try to find a new tone in the lyrical mood. Or rather, I found it without even looking, simply by reflecting in music what your poems stirred up in me.”

The poem that stirred up *Transfigured Night* was “Zwei Menschen” or “Two People” from Demel’s collection *Weib und Welt* (*Woman and World*) published in 1896. It detailed a shockingly unconventional love story for that period. Two lovers walk at night “through the bare cold woods.” She soon confesses that she is bearing a child, but it is not her companion’s. In despair and longing for motherhood, she had given herself to a stranger. “Now life has taken its revenge/ Now I met you, you”—the man she truly loves. But the man surprises her with his compassionate response: “The child that you have conceived/be to your soul no burden,/oh look, how clear the universe

glitters! ... It will transfigure the strange child.” At peace, they embrace, then continue to walk on through the now transfigured “high, bright night.”

Schoenberg’s *Transfigured Night* was composed in just three weeks in September 1899 while the composer was vacationing in the Austrian countryside with his composition teacher Alexander von Zemlinsky. Undoubtedly, further inspiration came from the presence of Zemlinsky’s sister, Mathilde, whom Schoenberg would marry two years later.

Its premiere was delayed until March 18, 1902 when the augmented Rosé Quartet (Arnold Rosé was Mahler’s brother-in-law) performed it in Vienna. And it was poorly received, though anti-Semitism may have fueled the booing. But like Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, *Transfigured Night* soon won an appreciative audience, and today it is by far Schoenberg’s best-loved work. In 1917, the composer created the version for string orchestra we’ll hear this evening.

The sheer sound of this work is utterly original and compelling. By expanding the usual four voices to six with added viola and cello, Schoenberg was able to create a sonority of great richness and variety. The added parts also suited the work’s thematic lavishness, with many brief yet emotionally evocative themes presented and combined in dense counterpoint. Yet just when the music seems in danger of smothering us with complexity, Schoenberg instinctively knows to thin his textures, unite his instruments, and drive straight to the heart with a disarmingly simple statement.

Following the five stanzas of Demel’s poem, *Transfigured Night* breaks down into five sections: a slow introduction with a “walking theme” setting the scene; a lengthy, emotionally anguished section cor-

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responding to the woman's confession; a transitional return to the walking music; another extended section for the man's response; and a concluding coda, in which the miracle of transfiguration takes place. The tonal progression is from D minor for the tragic beginning to D major for the exalted conclusion.

Midway through, after the woman's tormented confession, the voices of the cellos eloquently voice the man's speech, absolving the woman of her burden of guilt. For the first time, we hear the "starry-night" transfiguration music with its glittering arpeggios and plucked strings.

In the work's coda, the walking theme returns yet again, now calm and flowing in the violins and accompanied by a warm counter-melody in the cellos. The music closes with the radiance of the transfiguration music—in the composer's words, "to glorify the miracles of nature that have changed this night of tragedy into a transfigured night."

Richard Strauss

Eine Alpensinfonie, Op. 64

An Alpine Symphony, Richard Strauss' last and most massive tone poem, is a work for special occasions. Calling for a gargantuan orchestra of more than 150 instrumentalists, it is economically and logistically an enormous challenge for any organization and thus is more often enjoyed on CD than in a live performance. And yet nearly every orchestra musician longs to play it, for it will call on their utmost virtuosity.

Composed between 1911 and 1915, *An Alpine Symphony* was a last, retrospective glance by a middle-aged Strauss at a musical genre he had exalted in his earlier years: the virtuoso symphonic tone poem that describes in a most precise and imaginative way an elaborate scenario. Needing new challenges, he had since moved on to the world of opera and had already created three extraordinary operatic successes in a row: *Salome*, *Elektra*, and the enchanting Viennese

rococo comedy *Der Rosenkavalier*. All these operas had been premiered by the Dresden Court Opera, which would also be entrusted with the debuts of several more Strauss stage works in the future. Dedicated to the director of the Dresden ensembles, Count Nicholas Seebach, *An Alpine Symphony* was a huge thank-you present to the orchestra that had been responsible for Strauss' latest successes. Premiered by that orchestra in Berlin under the composer's baton on October 28, 1915, it was only a muted success because in the second year of World War I audiences were in no mood to fully appreciate its sonic splendors.

This is a symphony in name only, for in no way does it follow the abstract formal principles that govern a true symphony. Strauss scholar Norman Del Mar instead calls it "a free descriptive fantasia." In 22 interlocking sections covering a 24-hour period, it describes the ascent of an Alpine peak experienced by the young Strauss in August 1879 when he was 15. Immediately after this event, he described it—and the first musical response it prompted—to a friend:

Recently, we made a great hiking party to the top of the Heimgarten, on which day we walked for 12 hours. At two in the morning, we rode on a handcart to the village, which lies at the foot of the mountain. Then we climbed by the light of lanterns in pitch-dark night and arrived at the peak after a five-hour march. There one has a splendid view: Lake Stafelsee, Riegsee ... then, the Isar valley with mountains, Ötz and Stubeir glaciers, Innsbruck mountains. ... The next day I described the whole hike on the piano. Naturally huge tone paintings and smarminess à la Wagner.

This memory was reinforced daily for the older Strauss by the superb views of the Bavarian Alps he could see from his study window in the luxurious new villa his opera proceeds had recently enabled him to build at Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

Despite the specific titles given to each section, this work is much more than a mo-

ment-by-moment musical diary of that long-ago climb: it is a musical worship of Nature in all its splendor and terror. Del Mar extols “the atmosphere of exaltation in the face of Nature’s mystery, which is perhaps the most important aspect of the work.” *An Alpine Symphony* mixes its powerful action sequences with rapt, reflective moments of great beauty—such as “Entrance into the Forest,” “Vision,” “Elegy,” and “After Tones”—in which the climber muses on the inner feelings aroused by his adventure. And despite the intimidating instrumental masses at his command—complete with wind machine and thunder machine for the climactic storm—Strauss often chooses to pare down his forces to produce subtle, fragile chamber-music effects.

The tone poem begins—and ends—with “Night,” a slow-tempo section in darkest B-flat minor. From out of the gloom, the assembling climbers can just make out the imposing bulk of the mountain, portrayed by a rising chordal motive in the trombones and tubas. The music gradually grows in volume and excitement until the sun finally rises—in a magnificent full-orchestra orchestral scale that, oddly, descends rather than ascends—and illuminates the Alpine peaks.

Now the climbers begin “The Ascent” to a vigorous dotted-rhythm theme, announced by the strings, which will be the tone poem’s most important melodic element. More rapturous music describes their joy and wonder at the beauty surrounding them, and as they enter a wooded region, we hear an extravagant passage for 12 off-stage horns (in German culture, horns were traditionally associated with hunting and thus with forests). “Entrance into the Forest” is an extended lyrical paean to the beauty of Nature, with a marvelous soft development of the climbing theme led by the strings.

The next stages of the adventure are also serene and feature very delicate and imaginative scoring. The climbers wander along a mountain brook until they come to its source

in a waterfall, where they see a magical, illusionary sprite playing in the rainbow-flecked foam (“Apparition”). This section also introduces another important theme: a lovely down-and-up melody in the horns (alert listeners will identify this as a virtual steal from the slow movement of the Bruch Violin Concerto!). Eventually, the climbers move out onto the Alm: a high mountain meadow where the cattle herds graze during the summer months; here, naturally, we hear cowbell and yodeling (a rustic blend of bassoons and clarinets) motives.

Now the trail becomes more difficult, and our climbers are temporarily lost in a thicket of confusing counterpoint and contradictory harmonies (“Through Thickets and Undergrowth on the Wrong Path”). Finally, they emerge “On the Glacier,” where glorious visions of the mountain (the powerful chordal motive from the work’s opening) encourage them on their perilous progress.

At last, they are “On the Summit.” This is the emotional climax of the work and one of the most thrilling moments in the orchestral repertoire. But Strauss is not a conventional composer who only gives us exaltation; he also expresses the climbers’ awe, even fear, in the face of this tremendous panorama with a frail, stammering oboe solo. The horns toll out the rocking Bruch Concerto theme. This sublime feeling continues into the next section, “Vision,” which movingly explores the mountaineers’ personal response to their achievement.

The glory fades, and in a veiled and eerie passage, Strauss describes the approach of a mountain storm. Here is some of *An Alpine Symphony*’s finest music. A counterpart to “Vision,” the “Elegy” section captures the apprehensive mood as we hear the rumbles of distant thunder. Then the winds rise, the raindrops very audibly begin to fall, and we are swept into the greatest storm sequence in the entire symphonic literature, complete with wind and thunder machines and a pealing organ to inflate the din.

While the storm still rages, the climbers begin their descent, with the shape of their climbing theme now reversed. The music subsides into a prolonged and intensely beautiful coda as the storm passes and the sun reappears and then slowly sets. The organ leads the elegiac “Ausklang” (“After Tones”) in which the weary climbers absorb and reflect on the emotions they have experienced on this remarkable day. As the last light fades, the dark, minor-mode “Night” music returns, much as we heard it

at the beginning. But the final murmurs of the violins express the exalted new emotions about the great mountain felt by those privileged to have conquered her peak.

—Janet E. Bedell © 2023

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

There is perhaps no other musical ensemble more closely associated with the history and tradition of European classical music than the **Vienna Philharmonic**. Over the past 180 years, this orchestra has experienced and influenced the course of musical history around the world. Even to this day, prominent soloists and conductors refer to the unique “Viennese Sound” as the outstanding quality that sets this orchestra apart from all others.

The fascination that the orchestra has held since its founding by Otto Nicolai in 1842 for prominent composers and conductors, as well as for audiences all over the world, is based upon the conscious maintenance of a homogenous musical style that is carefully bequeathed from one generation to the next, as well as a unique history and organizational structure. The pillars of the “Philharmonic Idea,” which remain valid even today, are a democratic organization that places the entire artistic and organizational decision-making process in the hands of the musicians themselves, and a close symbiosis with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra. Vienna Philharmonic statutes stipulate that only musicians from the opera orchestra can become members of the Vienna Philharmonic.

Another unique feature of this democratic structure is that the orchestra itself is solely

responsible for the organization of concerts and the selection of repertoire, as well as the engaging of conductors and soloists. In 1860, the Subscription Concert series was introduced, for which one conductor was engaged for an entire season. These concerts formed a solid artistic and economic basis that remains in place to this day. Beginning in 1933, the orchestra adapted a system of guest conductors that promotes a wide spectrum of artistic encounters with the most prominent conductors of each generation.

The orchestra’s touring activities began at the beginning of the 20th century and have since taken the orchestra to all continents on the globe. In recent years, this has included regularly scheduled concerts in Germany, Japan, China, and the United States. The relationship to Japan and the Japanese audiences is so close that even in the pandemic year 2020 the orchestra’s tour to Japan took place after the implementation of extensive security measures and a tour-long quarantine. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Vienna Philharmonic has taken a leading role through testing and studies and became the first orchestra in the world to play concerts for live audiences after the first lockdown in June 2020.

In 2018, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra Academy was founded. Students are

selected in accordance with a strict, internationally oriented audition process and trained at the highest level during a two-year course of study. The members of the first academy class of 2019–21 have successfully completed the program.

The Vienna Philharmonic has made it its mission to communicate the humanitarian message of music into the daily lives and consciousness of its listeners. From the beginning, the orchestra has displayed a strong social consciousness, characterized by a commitment to individuals in need and the fostering of young musicians.

The orchestra has received numerous prizes and awards. Since 2008, it has been supported by ROLEX, its exclusive sponsor.

The Vienna Philharmonic performs approximately 40 concerts in Vienna annually, among them the New Year's Concert and the Summer Night Concert Schönbrunn, which are broadcast in numerous countries around the world. The orchestra also has an annual summer residency at the Salzburg Festival and performs more than 50 concerts a year on its international tours. All of these activities underscore the reputation of the Vienna Philharmonic as one of the world's finest orchestras.

Since the 2012–13 season, **Christian Thielemann** has been Principal Conductor of the Staatskapelle Dresden. Following engagements at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, in Gelsenkirchen, Karlsruhe, Hanover, and Dusseldorf, in 1988 he moved to Nuremberg to occupy the post of Generalmusikdirektor. In 1997, he returned to his hometown of Berlin to direct the Deutsche Oper until 2004, when he became Music Director of the Munich Philharmonic, a post he held until 2011. In addition to his current position in Dresden, Thielemann has been Artistic Director of the Salzburg Easter Festival since 2013, where the Staatskapelle is resident orchestra.

Thielemann has contributed greatly to the birthday celebrations for Wagner, Strauss, and Beethoven. At the same time, he has explored a wide range of music from Bach to Gubaidulina in Dresden and on tour. With the Semperoper, he recently conducted new productions of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Capriccio* while for the Salzburg Easter Festival he interpreted *Die Walküre*, *Tosca*, and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Thielemann maintains close ties to the Berlin Philharmonic and the Vienna Philharmonic, whose New Year's Concert he conducted in 2019. Following his debut at the Bayreuth Festival in 2000, he has returned every year to thrill audiences with his benchmark interpretations. After serving five years as the festival's Musical Advisor, in June 2015 he became its Music Director. In addition, he has been invited to conduct the leading orchestras of Europe, the United States, Israel, and Asia.

As a UNITEL exclusive artist, Thielemann has a comprehensive catalogue of recordings. His most recent projects with the Staatskapelle have been to record the symphonies of Anton Bruckner and Robert Schumann, Arnold Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, as well as numerous operas.

Christian Thielemann is an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music in London and an honorary professor at Dresden's Carl Maria von Weber College of Music, and holds honorary doctorates from the Franz Liszt University of Music in Weimar and the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. In 2003, he received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In May 2015, he received the Richard Wagner Prize from the Richard Wagner Society of the city of Leipzig, followed by the Prize of the Semperoper Trust in 2016 and an honorary award from the state of Salzburg in 2022. He is patron of the Richard-Wagner-Stätten in Graupa. Thielemann's recordings have been showered with awards.

Concertmaster

Rainer Honeck
Volkhard Steude
Albena Danailova

First Violin

Jun Keller
Daniel Froschauer
Maxim Brilinsky
Benjamin Morrison
Luka Ljubas
Martin Kubik
Milan Šetena
Martin Zalodek
Kirill Kobantschenko
Wilfried Hedenborg
Johannes Tomböck
Pavel Kuzmichev
Isabelle Ballot
Andreas Großbauer
Olesya Kurylyak
Thomas Küblböck
Alina Pinchas-Küblböck
Alexandr Sorokow
Ekaterina Frolova
Petra Kovačić
Katharina Engelbrecht
Lara Kusztrich*

Second Violin

Raimund Lissy
Christoph Koncz
Gerald Schubert
Patricia Hood-Koll
Adela Frasinéanu-Morrison
Helmut Zehetner
Alexander Steinberger
Tibor Kováč
Harald Krumpöck
Michal Kostka
Benedict Lea
Marian Lesko
Johannes Kostner
Martin Klimek
Jewgenij Andrusenko
Shkelzen Doli
Holger Tautscher-Groh
Júlia Gyenge
Liya Frass

Viola

Tobias Lea
Christian Frohn
Wolf-Dieter Rath
Robert Bauerstatter
Elmar Landerer
Martin Lemberg
Ursula Ruppe
Innokenti Grabko
Michael Strasser
Thilo Fechner
Thomas Hajek
Daniela Ivanova
Sebastian Führinger
Tilman Kühn
Barnaba Poprawski

Violoncello

Tamás Varga
Peter Somodari
Raphael Flieder
Csaba Bornemisza
Sebastian Bru
Wolfgang Härtel
Eckart Schwarz-Schulz
Stefan Gartmayer
Ursula Wex
Edison Pashko
Bernhard Hedenborg
David Pennetzdorfer

Double Bass

Herbert Mayr
Christoph Wimmer-Schenkel
Ódón Rácz
Jerzy Dybał
Izток Hrasnik
Filip Waldmann
Alexander Matschineg
Michael Bladerer
Bartosz Sikorski
Jan Georg Leser
Jedrzej Górski
Elias Mai

Harp

Charlotte Balzereit
Anneleen Lenaerts

Flute

Walter Auer
Karl-Heinz Schütz
Luc Mangholz
Günter Federsel
Wolfgang Breinschmid
Karin Bonelli

Oboe

Clemens Horak
Sebastian Breit
Harald Hörth
Wolfgang Plank
Herbert Maderthaner

Clarinet

Matthias Schorn
Daniel Ottensamer
Gregor Hinterreiter
Andreas Wieser
Andrea Götsch

Bassoon

Harald Müller
Sophie Dervaux
Štěpán Turnovský
Wolfgang Koblitz
Benedikt Dinkhauser

Horn

Ronald Janezic
Josef Reif
Manuel Huber
Sebastian Mayr
Wolfgang Lintner
Jan Janković
Wolfgang Vladár
Thomas Jöbstl
Wolfgang Tomböck
Lars Stransky

Trumpet

Martin Mühlfellner
Stefan Haimel
Jürgen Pöchhacker
Reinhold Ambros
Gotthard Eder

Trombone

Dietmar Küblböck
Enzo Turriziani
Wolfgang Strasser
Kelton Koch
Mark Gaal
Johann Ströcker

Tuba

Paul Halwax
Christoph Gigler

Percussion

Anton Mittermayr
Erwin Falk
Thomas Lechner
Klaus Zauner
Oliver Madas
Benjamin Schmidingner
Johannes Schneider

** confirmed members of
the Vienna State Opera
Orchestra who do not yet
belong to the association
of the Vienna Philharmonic*

Retired

Volker Altmann
Roland Baar
Franz Bartolomey
Roland Berger
Bernhard Biberauer
Walter Blovsky
Gottfried Boitsits
Wolfgang Brand
Rudolf Degen
Reinhard Dürrer
Alfons Egger
Fritz Falit
Dieter Flury
Jörgen Fog
George Frithum
Martin Gabriel
Peter Götzel
Wolfgang Gürtler
Bruno Hartl
Richard Heintzinger
Josef Hell
Clemens Hellsberg
Wolfgang Herzer
Johann Hindler
Werner Hink
Roland Horvath
Josef Hummel
Gerhard Iberer
Willibald Janezic
Karl Jeitler
Rudolf Josef
Mario Karwan
Erich Kaufmann
Gerhard Kaufmann
Harald Kautzky
Heinrich Koll
Hubert Kroisamer
Rainer Küchl
Edward Kudlak
Manfred Kuhn
Walter Lehmayr
Anna Leikes
Gerhard Libensky
Erhard Litschauer
Günter Lorenz
Gabriel Madas
William McElheney
Rudolf Nekvasil
Hans Peter Ochsenhofer
Alexander Öhlberger
Reinhard Öhlberger
Ortwin Otmaier
Peter Pecha
Fritz Pfeiffer
Josef Pomberger
Kurt Prihoda
Helmuth Puffler
Reinhard Repp
Werner Resel
Milan Sagat
Erich Schagerl
Rudolf Schmidingner
Peter Schmidl
Hans Peter Schuh
Wolfgang Schuster
Günter Seifert
Reinhold Siegl
Walter Singer
Helmut Skalar
Franz Söllner
René Staar
Anton Straka
Norbert Täubl
Gerhard Tutschek
Martin Unger
Peter Wächter
Hans Wolfgang Weihs
Helmut Weiss
Michael Werba
Dietmar Zeman

Wednesday, March 8, 2023, 7:30pm
Zellerbach Hall

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Christian Thielemann, *principal conductor*

PROGRAM 2

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847) *The Hebrides Overture*, Op. 26 (1830)

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56,
Scottish (1841–42)

Andante con moto; Allegro un poco agitato

Scherzo. Vivace non troppo

Adagio

Allegro vivacissimo; Allegro maestoso assai

INTERMISSION

Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897) *Symphony No. 2 in D major*, Op. 73 (1877)

Allegro non troppo

Adagio non troppo

Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino)

Allegro con spirito

Felix Mendelssohn*The Hebrides Overture, Op. 26**Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56,
Scottish***Johannes Brahms***Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73*

Mendelssohn and Brahms came from backgrounds that could not have been more different. Mendelssohn, a child of privilege, grew up in cosmopolitan Berlin, surrounded by money and culture. His grandfather was the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, his father a successful banker. Felix's genius manifested early, not just in music—his keyboard and compositional facility is often compared to the young Mozart's—but he possessed as well a remarkable gift for drawing and painting, for poetry, for languages. Brahms also revealed his musical gifts as a child, but there the similarities end. He grew up in Hamburg, near the docks. His father struggled to support the family on a musician's pay; his mother, 17 years her husband's senior, took in sewing to supplement the household income. Whereas Mendelssohn augmented his education by traveling widely, trips to England winning him fans among British music-lovers including Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, Brahms as a young man learned the less glamorous facts of the musical profession on a short concert tour of the north German states, his recital partner an obscure Hungarian violinist. Mendelssohn dressed with style and paid attention to his appearance. Brahms, handsome as a model in his youth, interpreted middle age as the license to expand his waistline, hide his face behind a beard that would grow ever more ragged with the years, and treat personal grooming as a joke.

Mendelssohn is often thought of as an artistic dandy, as though the elfin quality of his music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had migrated in listeners' minds to his other

works. In his 2003 biography of the composer, R. Larry Todd attempted to demolish the perception that "Mendelssohn's music evinced a 'pretty' elegance and superficiality that could not withstand the weightier 'profoundity' of Beethoven and Wagner." Wagner, indeed. It was Wagner who attacked Mendelssohn in his 1850 essay "Judaism in Music," a document as obtuse and hateful as anything spat out by an Oathkeeper or a Proud Boy, attacking Jewish culture in general and Mendelssohn in particular for a catalog of offenses and inadequacies, among them the inability to create art that penetrated to the essence of things.

But Wagner dismissed Brahms, too. And if Brahms' work, like Mendelssohn's, supposedly erected a barrier between ear and heart, its failure lay not in its emotional flimsiness, but in its clotty intellectual rigor and abstraction, severe in the manner of composers long dead.

Beyond those stereotypes, the dainty Mendelssohn and the gruff Brahms, lie two composers with more in common than Wagner's dislike. Both embraced classical principles, both wanted to please their audience with music whose appeal lay not just in the beauty of its skin but also in the firmness of the sinews beneath. This evening we hear works conceived in different ways, works that represent programmatic and so-called "absolute" music. Those differences can make us reflect on how music moves us, and it is in that power to move us that those differences fade.

Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture* is a tone poem in all but name. His *Scottish Symphony* continues in that pictorial vein, music that is "about" something, music inspired by or commenting on the world outside itself—a landscape, say, or a state of mind, or a story. For Brahms, landscape painting was never among music's tasks or its capacities. He believed music possessed the intrinsic power to touch a listener, and his symphony is an example of music whose

references are only to itself: forms beautiful in their own right, as a Rothko painting or a Henry Moore sculpture.

IN 1829, AFTER WOWING LONDON'S MUSIC LOVERS, Mendelssohn took a break and set out with a friend on a tour of Scotland, including a visit to the Inner Hebrides, off the country's northwest coast. On the island of Staffa, they visited Fingal's Cave. This grotto, distinguished by massive rock columns that resemble great organ pipes, attracted a host of Romantic writers and artists, among them Keats and Wordsworth, Tennyson and Turner. The barren seascape captivated Mendelssohn, and even before setting eyes on the cave he sketched a theme intended to suggest the rolling sea and Hebridean mists. This theme, which opens the overture, was the only part of the composition that came quickly. Mendelssohn labored on the music for three years, introducing it at last in 1832. He titled it variously at various stages of composition, and even today it is known as both the *Fingal's Cave* Overture and, less specifically but more evocatively, *The Hebrides* Overture.

The Mendelssohn symphony on this program also owes its genesis to that tour of Scotland. At sunset one July evening, visiting Mary Queen of Scots' Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh, Mendelssohn was moved by the ruins of the abbey and by what he knew of the ill-fated queen's history. He would translate these reflections into the opening of his *Scottish* Symphony, which, like the overture, would wait years to be realized. Both works, writes R. Larry Todd, "seem inspired more by a synaesthetic blending of the visual and musical, and by highlighting the painterly attributes of music [rather] than by elucidating a dramatic narrative." Exactly how music suggests visual images is a puzzle that perhaps only a psychologist or philosopher can solve. Our willingness to play along surely helps, although a listener's enthusiasm can be misleading. No less a listener than Robert

Schumann confused Mendelssohn's *Scottish* and *Italian* symphonies. He praised the *Scottish*'s "beautiful Italian pictures."

About the overture. To begin, violas, cellos, and bassoon state a stealthy six-note figure. Whatever image it suggests (waves spied through a veil of mist?), this brooding passage will propel almost everything that follows, including one of music's loveliest earworms, introduced by the cellos with a shift into the major mode a few minutes along. Mendelssohn weaves his very few materials into a tightly knit, gorgeously evocative piece, ending as it began, with a recollection of the opening figure, then evaporating into silence. Todd tells us that the Debussy scholar Edward Lockspeiser labeled the overture "one of the first examples of musical Impressionism."

Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3, his *Scottish* Symphony, is dedicated to Queen Victoria, and it was first performed in 1842, 13 years after the evening at Holyrood that inspired it. If we choose to, we can detect something of that solemn twilight scene in the brooding, impassioned introduction. From this slow music, the Allegro emerges. Perhaps the music is tinged with a Scottish quality, though you should know that Mendelssohn himself dropped the work's "Scottish" title. The keening second subject suggests a folkloric character before the music grows nebulous, transitioning to the development, in which an overtly pictorial passage suggests sudden gusts of wind. The movement ends as it began, that slow music setting the stage for a buzzing in the strings, background to a rustic dancelike tune in the winds, the onset of the Scherzo. This brief interlude leads back to the spirit of the symphony's introduction and prepares us for an elegant Adagio, wistful and pensive. From an almost motionless calm, the mood shifts into an aggressive forward motion, announcing the final movement. Suddenly the tempo slows. Winds call to each other. After a brief silence, the orchestra proclaims a

noble theme that emerges as though from nowhere. It is unmistakably triumphant, as though all the struggles and tensions visited until now are finished—not so much resolved as forgotten.

JOHANNES BRAHMS LAUNCHED HIS SYMPHONIC CAREER far later than forebears such as Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven. Brahms saw them as examples, inspiring and intimidating. For years he remained determined to join their league, to harness the orchestra as they had and add his name to the historic line they represented. By the time he completed his first symphony, in 1876, he was already 43.

That first symphony had cost him 14 years of hard work. Now, in just four months Brahms turned out a second symphony during a pleasant summer at the Austrian lakeside resort of Pörschach. The first symphony is an epic. The second, as musicologist Reinhold Brinkman has said, is an idyll. When it was unveiled at the end of 1877, the public loved it.

Listen to the first three notes in the low strings. From those basic building blocks—that grouping of notes and the gesture they form—Brahms generates an opening movement that sounds miraculously varied, one tune leading to another, but somehow always tied to home base. This symphony is almost invariably described as “sunny,” and that is often how it’s approached. But there are clouds in this sky, starting with the theme that resembles Brahms’ famous lullaby.

The opening movement’s coda, bitter-sweet and sigh-filled, is tempered by the jaunty little tune that sounds almost tacked on as an afterthought. Such a rapid mood-change is another hallmark of this symphony: the alternation of light and dark, a study in chiaroscuro. Helen Schlegel in E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* said that Beethoven can be trusted because, even when his music is at its most resplendent, the goblins return. The *dramatis personae* of the Brahms Sec-

ond may not include goblins, but in their place we find characters who know that good times can reverse quickly.

Two such characters are the main players in the second movement, whose stern opening changes almost immediately into a glorious melody of enormous length and breadth. Throughout this movement, one voice is pensive and searching, the other full of optimism. This is densely argued, concentrated music, music that can seem—but only seem—to wander as it grows increasingly meditative.

The Allegretto grazioso that follows is Brahms at his most lighthearted. It offers a welcome break after the Adagio; and, when considered as a pair with that movement, it reinforces the Adagio’s two voices: the concurrence of pensive and joyful.

The finale proved such a hit at the symphony’s first performance that it was encores. The opening hush erupts suddenly in a shout—another quick cut from one character to its opposite. At the end, the orchestra embraces a heroic transformation of the movement’s poignant second subject, that sweetly killing reminder that every silver lining masks a cloud. To call the first appearance of this theme a *memento mori* would be going too far. Think of it instead as Brahms’ attempt to present a complete picture, an acknowledgment of the world’s serious demands and an assurance that, rising to the challenge, we can hope for the kind of payoff unleashed in this music’s final bars.

—Larry Rothe

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For orchestra background and a biography of the conductor, please see pp. CP-20 & 21.

Thursday, March 9, 2023, 7:30pm
Zellerbach Hall

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Christian Thielemann, *principal conductor*

PROGRAM 3

Anton BRUCKNER (1824–1896) Symphony No. 8 in C minor,
original version, Robert Haas editor
Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegro moderato – Trio: Langsam
Adagio: Feierlich langsam,
doch nicht schleppend
Finale: Feierlich, nicht schnell

*This program will be performed without an intermission
and will last approximately 70 minutes.*

Anton Bruckner**Symphony No. 8 in C minor,
original version, Robert Haas editor**

Born in rural Upper Austria to a family of sturdy peasant origins, Anton Bruckner was the latest bloomer of all the major composers. His early life was devoted to teaching and service as organist in a series of local churches, including the great Baroque abbey of St. Florian. There his potential as a composer was revealed by his mesmerizing improvisations on this instrument. With great reluctance, he left his provincial sanctuary for Vienna in 1868 at the advanced age of 44. There he wrote his last eight symphonies while building a legend at the Vienna Conservatory as a beloved but eccentric teacher of composition and counterpoint. So devout a Catholic was Bruckner that students recalled his interrupting classes to kneel in prayer at the sound of the Angelus bell from nearby St. Stefan's Cathedral.

As Bruckner completed his Eighth Symphony at age 63, he was at the peak of his powers. In performances in Germany and Vienna during 1885 and 1886, his Seventh Symphony had brought him the greatest acclaim of his career. In September 1887, convinced that he had created his finest work, he sent the score of the Eighth to his friend, the noted conductor Herman Levi. But despite his admiration for the Seventh, Levi found he could not comprehend this longest and most mystical of Bruckner's scores. Regretfully, he sent word he couldn't perform it and suggested revisions.

Bruckner was devastated. Levi's rejection led to a crisis of confidence that lasted for years and undoubtedly prevented the aging composer from completing his Ninth Symphony. Not only did he revise his Eighth, but with the eager assistance of his pupils Josef and Franz Schalk and Ferdinand Löwe, he rewrote his First through Fourth symphonies as well. Although the revision of the Eighth, completed in 1890, did actually

strengthen Bruckner's original concept somewhat, the work on the other symphonies did more harm than good, as Löwe and the Schalks took substantial cuts and made the orchestrations more sumptuously Wagnerian. Despite his acquiescence, Bruckner still stubbornly believed in his original versions and carefully preserved them "for the future."

In the 1930s, the International Bruckner Society, under the direction of Robert Haas, tried to straighten out the resulting mess by issuing editions of the symphonies cleansed of the cuts and embellishments made by Bruckner's pupils. In the problematic case of the Eighth, Haas used some creative license. Recognizing that the 1890 revision was in many ways superior, he published that version but with some material in the third and fourth movements restored from the 1887 original.

Bruckner's Musical Style

Bruckner's symphonies are spiritual quests: homages to God in whom he fervently believed and whom he sought to glorify in his music. "Each of his symphonies is in reality one gigantic arch which starts on earth in the midst of suffering humanity, sweeps up towards the heavens to the very Throne of Grace, and returns to earth with a message of peace," writes biographer Hans-Hubert Schönzeler.

To enter into the world of a Bruckner symphony—and especially into the visionary splendor of the Eighth Symphony, the composer's longest and by general consent his greatest—listeners must readjust their 21st-century internal clocks. Inspired by Wagner's tremendous expansion of the operatic form, Bruckner conceived his symphonic movements on a very broad scale. Even when his tempos are not actually slow, his music still seems leisurely. Bruckner themes are very long: built cumulatively from many elements. Fortunately, he initially presents them twice, which helps us

fix them in our minds for the considerable duration of his movements. His harmonic strategies are even more protracted: harmonies often change slowly, and the home key becomes a distant goal approached by a very circuitous route. Actually, Bruckner's model for the Eighth is less Wagner than Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

Bruckner has been unfairly accused of writing for immense, swollen orchestras in the manner of Wagner or Mahler. In fact, he was a master of achieving monumental effects from moderate orchestral means. For the Eighth Symphony, he employed his largest ensemble, but its only special additions are the eight horns—four of them doubling on Wagner tubas (a hybrid of horn and tuba devised for the *Ring* operas)—plus two harps for the second and third movements. Bruckner's orchestral sound is unique and extraordinarily effective. Like the great organist he was, he juxtaposed contrasting blocks of wind, brass, or string sound much as an organist moves to different manuals with new stop combinations. His strategy for building his immense climaxes was to fall continually short of the summit and build again to achieve truly Olympian heights.

Just as we allow our pulse to slow when we enter a cathedral, so must we turn off our beepers and surrender ourselves to a world beyond time as we listen to this composer. In the words of Bruckner scholar Robert Simpson, this composer's art has "a special appeal in our time to our urgent need for calm and sanity, for a deep stability in the world, whatever our beliefs, religious or other."

Listening to the Eighth

First Movement: The symphony begins with the characteristic Bruckner sound of hushed tremolo violins. Against this time-less background, we hear a disturbed, questioning theme leaping upward on jagged rhythms, then drooping backward. After

each pause, it grows a little more. Bruckner interrupts its close and cadence on C minor with a more dramatic statement of the theme that veers farther from home. Violins then introduce the gentler second theme group, beginning with a rising scale; this, too, is repeated in variation and reaches a noble summit. A third and final thematic group features loud downward cascades between antiphonal groups of instruments, each playing together in a mighty "Bruckner unison."

But the music soon darkens and loses its way. The movement expresses humanity's plight on earth, and here questions are not easily answered, nor goals reached. A huge climax reprises the opening theme and marks a temporary arrival home in C minor. But subsequent events undermine this security, and the movement ends in a tragic coda, added by Bruckner in his 1890 revision of the score. He called it the "Death Watch" and likened it to a dying man watching a clock ticking steadily as his life ebbs away.

Second movement: Bruckner transforms the Eighth's Scherzo in C major from its rural Austrian dance origins into something huge and cosmic. Simpson likens it to "a celestial engine"; to this writer, it sounds like a heavenly carillon—perhaps the peal of God's laughter. Descending bell peals juxtaposed against ascending ones form the thematic substance. This scherzo encloses a lengthy trio section in A-flat. Lyrical and serene, it suggests Bruckner's beloved home in Upper Austria and contains some of his loveliest orchestral writing, emphasizing the warm colors of horns, strings, and harps.

Movement three, in D-flat major, is one of the greatest Adagios created by the man Austrians dubbed the *Adagio-Komponist* for his tragic eloquence in slow movements. Composed of variations on two large thematic groups, it offers, after much striving, a fleeting vision of Heaven to the yearning soul. Over pulsing strings, we hear a sighing

melody in the violins. This grows into an arduous climb toward God, plunges briefly back to the depths, then miraculously reaches a heavenly vision of radiant violins and harps. The whole process is then repeated in somewhat condensed form. Cellos next introduce the beautiful second theme group: more passionate and yearning, it also includes a stunning dark-velvet passage for the horns and Wagner tubas.

Two more cycles expand and develop these thematic elements. And here we have a spectacular example of Bruckner's climax-building technique of breaking off just short of the summit and falling back to build higher still. When the climax is finally reached, it is followed by the most soaring version of the "vision of Heaven" music. This, too, is fleeting, but in a magnificent coda Bruckner expresses his confidence he will ultimately reach Heaven.

Finale: Buoyed by his vision and still in the key of D-flat, Bruckner opens his last movement with a burst of joyous energy. Over galloping strings, horns and trombones blare out a darkly triumphant theme. Then a pause, and the contrast of a lushly contrapuntal second theme for strings. Another pause, and Bruckner brings on a

sturdy clod-hopping march for his "Bruckner-unison" third theme. Then the drama ensues as we set out on the protracted search for C-minor home. Three times the brass try to muscle their way in with the main theme, always in the wrong key. When they finally succeed, the recapitulation is tremendous with trumpets intensifying the galloping rhythm. After a wonderful contrapuntal setting of the rustic march, brass brutally cut in with the questioning theme that opened the symphony well over an hour ago. But now questions have been answered, and Heaven is in sight. Displaying his consummate mastery of counterpoint, Bruckner triumphantly combines the principal themes of all four movements. With a unison shout, the entire orchestra turns the question into a joyous C-major affirmation.

—Janet E. Bedell © 2023

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

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