UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF MUSIC PRESENTS

NATIONAL FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

MILANOV CONDUCTS STRAUSS

SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2013 . 8PM

ELSIE & MARVIN DEKELBOUM CONCERT HALL
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
University of Maryland

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PROGRAM
SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2013

ROSSEN MILANOV, CONDUCTOR

STRAUSS
Don Juan, Symphonic Poem after Lenau, Op. 20

TCHAIKOVSKY
Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 35*
Allegro moderato (first movement)

INTERMESSION

STRAUSS
A Hero’s Life, Op. 40
The Hero—
The Hero’s Adversaries—
The Hero’s Helpmate—
The Hero’s Battlefield—
The Hero’s Works of Peace—
The Hero’s Withdrawal from the World—Conclusion

*The soloist for tonight’s performance of Tchaikovsky’s violin concerto was selected by audition from among the NOI participants.
Strauss was only 23 years old when he began work on *Don Juan*, in the same year in which Brahms produced the last of his orchestral works, the Double Concerto, and just two years after the last of Brahms’ four symphonies. The success of the work, in 1889, not only established Strauss among the important composers of his time, but also encouraged more than a few arbiters of musical taste to regard him as Brahms’ preordained successor. It must have appeared, however, that there were more contrasts between the two composers than there were similarities.

Brahms was not at home in the theater, or in composing programmatic orchestral works. Strauss, on the other hand, encouraged by the same Hans von Bülow who had championed the works of Brahms and Wagner alike, became the most respected opera composer of his time, and nearly all his mature works for orchestra are programmatic or descriptive. He is on record as declaring that it was all but impossible for him to work without a literary or dramatic stimulus, and even at 23 he had the imaginativeness to turn to a then new and unorthodox version of the famous legend of Don Juan Tenorio.

The earliest known telling of this tale goes back almost as far in time as the earliest traceable version of the Faust legend. Christopher Marlowe, the author of *Doctor Faustus*, died in 1593 at the age of 29. Gabriel Téllez, the Spanish dramatist who signed himself “Tirso de Molina,” was born six years later than Marlowe and lived till 1648; it was in 1630, at age 60, that he produced his play *El burlador de Sevilla*, in which Don Juan is the central character. Just as Faust was to be treated in various literary and musical works (the most famous, of course, being the two-part dramatic poem by Goethe, the direct inspiration for most of the musical *Fausts*), Don Juan, too, was to fascinate a succession of writers from Molière to Bernard Shaw and beyond, by way of Lord Byron and Alfred de Musset, and has inspired at least a dozen operas in addition to Mozart’s masterpiece. The literary treatment that struck the imagination of the young Strauss in 1887 was written only 43 years earlier by the author of one of the “other” Fausts.

Nikolaus Franz Niemsch von Strethenau (1802-1850), who called himself Nikolaus Lenau, was an Austro-Hungarian poet whose verses were used as song texts by literally hundreds of composers. It was for Lenau’s version of Faust that Liszt composed his *Mephisto Waltz* and a companion piece called *Der nächtliche Zug*. Henri Rabaud also dealt with the latter episode, in his tone poem *La Procession nocturne*. Lenau died in a madhouse, leaving his *Don Juan* unfinished, but the character of the hero was fully drawn: it is different from the one we know in Mozart’s opera or from most other sources, and this sympathetic and probing portrait of the amatory conquistador appealed to Strauss far more than the traditional image of the malevolent rakehell.

Don Juan as pictured by Lenau is not so much libertine as frustrated idealist: a man searching for the elusive ideal, the one woman who would embody all that is noblest and wisest, a challenging companion to bring a sense of completeness to his own life. In Lorenzo da Ponte’s brilliant libretto for Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* we are given a humorous catalogue of the Don’s conquests, and at the end he is literally dragged down to Hell by the animated marble statue of the Commendatore, a man he had killed while attempting to abduct his daughter. Lenau’s Don Juan shows sensitivity as well as cleverness and drive, and his cynicism is directed not only toward his conquests and victims, but also toward life in general. At the end, hopelessly weary of a life without meaning or peace, he picks a duel with Don Pedro, the Commendatore’s avenging son, and simply allows himself to be run through.
The exuberance and impetuosity of Don Juan himself, so vividly projected in the work’s opening, are contrasted with episodes of tenderness and several “feminine” themes, all going by in what Richard Specht described, in his foreword to the score, as an “intoxicating carnival procession.” But even the stunningly heroic theme given to the horns (and subsequently quoted to great effect in A Hero’s Life), for all its noble thrust, is less a proclamation of triumph than an acknowledgment of the idealistic yearning beyond any possibility of true fulfillment. The world-weary hero (or anti-hero) meets his end unceremoniously; there is no hint of a grand gesture, and there is no peroration.

Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 35 — First Movement

When Tchaikovsky offered his Violin Concerto to Leopold Auer, that brilliant Hungarian-born violinist (remembered now primarily as a pedagogue, teacher of such virtuosis as Heifetz and Milstein) declared the work “unplayable,” just as Nikolai Rubinstein had done when Tchaikovsky had offered him his First Piano Concerto a few years earlier. In the case of the Piano Concerto, Tchaikovsky was fortunate in having the redoubtable Hans von Bülow (already mentioned in the foregoing note on Don Juan) take up the work with enthusiasm as the vehicle for his American début in Boston, less than a year after Rubinstein rejected it; the Violin Concerto, however, waited nearly three years for its premiere, which again took place outside Russia.

While this background is well known, the part played by a third violinist in bringing this immensely beloved concerto into being is barely known, as indeed is his very name. Yosif Kotek (1855-1885), said to have been an exceptionally gifted violinist, was also among Tchaikovsky’s composition pupils at the Moscow Conservatory, and a close friendship developed between them. On his graduation in 1875, Kotek was engaged by the wealthy widow Nadezhda von Meck, on Rubinstein’s recommendation, to perform new music in her home, and it was in that role that he brought Tchaikovsky to the attention of the woman who became the composer’s patron. Without Mme. von Meck to turn to with his confidences (always through correspondence — they never met in person during their 13-year relationship) and Kotek to talk to, Tchaikovsky might not have survived the disastrous marriage he so incredulously entered into in July 1877.

He fled to Italy in the fall of that year, and Kotek left Russia at the same time to study with Joseph Joachim in Berlin; in the following March they caught up with each other at Claren’s, Tchaikovsky’s favorite Swiss retreat, and it was there, on the 17th of that month, that the Violin Concerto was begun as a gesture of friendship. The first movement was completed in two weeks, the remainder on April 11, by which time the original slow movement had already been replaced with the exquisite Canzonetta. (The deleted Andante, titled Méditation, subsequently became the first section of the three-part suite Souvenir d’un lieu cher for violin and piano, Op. 42.)

Although Tchaikovsky felt that Kotek had mastered the Concerto well enough to perform it, Kotek had reservations about his readiness, and it was only then that the work was offered to Auer. The first performance, which did not take place until late in 1881, was the only Tchaikovsky premiere given by the illustrious Vienna
Philharmonic; on the podium was the most respected conductor of his time, and the soloist was a violinist who believed in the new work without reservation.

Even under these favorable conditions, this eminently lovable concerto touched off energetic protests on that occasion. the notorious Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, who was actually not without admiration for Tchaikovsky, used in his review an expression usually translated as “music that stinks in the ear.” That harsh judgment was soon overwhelmingly repudiated, and one of the first to reject it was Auer, who, just as Rubenstein had done in the case of Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto, took up the work after all; he became one of its great interpreters, and also taught the work to two generations of Russian violinists who further ensured its place in the repertory.

Auer left Russia in 1918 to settle in the United States, and died in Germany 12 years later, at age 85. Brodsky, too, was active in our country for a short time, serving as concertmaster of the New York Symphony Orchestra from 1891 to 1894; he then moved to England, where he died 18 months after Auer. The now forgotten Kotek, who never performed the concerto written for him, died of consumption in Switzerland a short time before his 30th birthday. his final months brightened by a visit from Tchaikovsky.

Music as well known as this calls for little comment, but many features call attention to themselves as contributors to its remarkable durability and what might be called its self-renewing freshness — and all of them are abundantly present in the opening movement. The writing for the orchestra is every bit as imaginative as for the soloist, and the eloquent passages for the various wind instruments in particular not only demonstrate the composer’s love for them in a general sense, but point up his gift for creating a sort of fairy-tale atmosphere with his coloring — as he had done in the earliest of his great ballet scores, Swan Lake, which had its premiere only a year before the Concerto was composed.

A Hero’s Life, Op. 40

RICHARD STRAUSS

Strauss composed this grand-scaled, blatantly pictorial tone poem in 1898 and, although he dedicated the score to Willem Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, he conducted the premiere himself, in Frankfurt, on March 3, 1899. The score calls for piccolo, 3 flutes, 4 oboes, English horn, 2 B-flat clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tenor tuba, bass tuba, timpani, snare drum, large tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, 2 harps and strings. Duration, 45 minutes.

While this work, composed at the ripe old age of 34, was not the last of Strauss’s symphonic poems, it was the last in the remarkable chain of seven works in this genre that he initiated ten years earlier with Don Juan and which established him as a major presence in the realm of orchestral music. It is, in fact, nothing less than a clear-cut autobiographical summing up of his achievements up to that time, when he was about to change his focus from the concert hall to the opera house. He gave this grandiose self-portrait the modest title Ein Heldenleben — “A Hero’s Life.”

In his earlier tone poems — Don Juan, Macbeth, Death and Transfiguration, Till Eulenspiegel, Thus Spake Zarathustra, Don Quixote — Strauss had used either literary works as models or (in the case of Death and Transfiguration) had someone put his own “program” into words after the music was written. Till Eulenspiegel is a portrait of a character from folklore; Zarathustra was a response to Nietzsche’s philosophical tome, whose actual words were subsequently set to music by Gustav Mahler and Frederick Delius. Regarding A Hero’s Life, Strauss declared, “There is no need for a program; it is enough to know there is a hero fighting his enemies.”

In a letter to his father (the respected Munich horn player Franz Strauss), a few weeks after the Frankfurt premiere, Strauss insisted that it was “only partly true” that the hero was himself. In a program note for the premiere he wrote that the work’s subject was “not a single poetical or historical figure, but rather a more general and free ideal of great and manly heroism.” Several commentators have supported his disclaimer, suggesting
that Strauss, like Beethoven in giving his Third Symphony the title *Eroica*, may have had a generalized ideal in mind, or perhaps a specific "hero of art" among his predecessors (such as Wagner), but surely not himself. Strauss actually referred to the Beethoven example when he undertook this work, advising in 1898 that because the *Eroica* had fallen into neglect he was composing his unprecedentedly large-scaled tone poem in order "to fulfill a pressing need … admittedly without a funeral march, but still in E-flat, with lots of horns, always a symbol of heroism."

The music, though, points stubbornly to its own author as its subject, and Strauss did concede, after all, in a remark to the writer Romain Rolland, that he found himself "no less interesting than Napoleon." His gesture of conducting the premiere himself instead of leaving that honor to the respected dedicatee may well be viewed as further confirmation of the work's self-congratulatory character.

No matter how one may feel about all that, *A Hero’s Life* represented in its time a new level in the exploitation of the resources of the modern orchestra, and it remains an outstanding landmark in that respect. It is laid out in six interconnected sections, each clearly defined in sound and given its own title. The first is a portrait of the Hero, introduced without preamble, its theme set off in a sort of growl, impetuously swelling through 16 bars and ranging across three octaves. Subsidiary themes represent the hero’s sensitivity, his intelligence, his ambition, his determination.

The Hero’s Adversaries, depicted in the second section, vie with one another in degrees of pettiness and nastiness. They are identified as the carpers (flute, "very shrill and biting"), the vituperators (oboe, "snarling"), the whiners (English horn) and the hair-splitters (tuba). Strauss not only had hostile music critics in mind, but, as Wagner had done in *Die Meistersinger*, singled out one of them for special attention. The chief hair-splitter is said to be a caricature of a Munich critic whose very name is mimicked by the tuba: “Doktor Dehring, Doktor Dehring.” Strauss’s father, noted for his outspokenness, wrote to him, “Those adversaries — in my opinion they transgress everything musical. Adversaries who behave so execrably — it is beneath one’s dignity to notice them.”

Strauss readily acknowledged The Hero’s Helpmate as a portrait of his wife, the soprano Pauline de Ahna, who had sung in Weimar performances of *Tristan und Isolde* under his baton in 1892 and in the premiere there of his own first opera, *Guntram*, in May 1894, four months before their wedding. She is represented here by the solo violin. "She is very complex," Strauss wrote to Romain Rolland, “a trifle perversive, a trifle coquettish, never the same, changing from minute to minute.” The love scene serves the dramatic function of preparing the hero spiritually and emotionally for the challenges to be met in the following section.

The Hero’s Battlefield, as a graphic description of combat on the most massive scale (reinforced with some of the troops offstage), remained without parallel in music until Prokofiev composed the music for the Battle on the Ice in Eisenstein’s film *Alexander Nevsky*. After the combat is stilled, the hero’s soaring theme prevails, and the magnificent theme for unison horns from *Don Juan* leads into the next section, perhaps the most intriguing and surely the most revelatory portion of the work.

It is in The Hero’s Works of Peace, with its further, and similarly undisguised, quotations from several of his earlier works, that Strauss gives himself away completely; but it is here, too, and in the concluding section, that he is at his most eloquent and truly noble. Following the transition effected by the theme from *Don Juan*, “Doktor Dehring” makes a brief reappearance (a reminder that great men’s deeds will always be misunderstood and unappreciated by small minds), and further quotations ensue: from the song “Traum durch die Dämmerung”; from *Guntram*; from *Don Juan*, Till Eulenspiegel, Death and Transfiguration, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

The Hero’s Withdrawal from the World, introduced by the English horn, brings recollections of the adversaries and the battlefield, but it is the rapturous love music that prevails, and the Conclusion, free of bombast, limns the hero’s hard-won self-assurance and serenity.
Rossen Milanov is the newly appointed Principal Conductor of Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias in Spain. He also serves as the Music Director of the Princeton Symphony Orchestra as well as the nationally recognized training orchestra, Symphony in C.

Respected and admired by audiences and musicians alike, Maestro Milanov has established himself as a conductor with a considerable international presence. An artist with distinct personal style, his performances are characterized by sharp musical intellect, artistic ingenuity, freedom and coherence.

Recent highlights include debuts at the Musikverein in Vienna, the Grant Park Music Festival in Chicago, Zurich Opera and a world premiere of Sergei Prokofiev’s Incidental music to Pushkin’s Evgeny Onegin with the Princeton Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Milanov has collaborated with some of the world’s most prestigious artists, including Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Joshua Bell, Midori, Christian Tetzlaff and Andre Watts, as well as with some of the world’s most esteemed vocalists such as Nikolai Ghiaurov, Vesselina Kasarova, Ghena Dimitrova and Krassimira Stoyanova.

During his 11-year tenure with The Philadelphia Orchestra he conducted more than 200 performances with that great orchestra, both as Associate Conductor and Artistic Director of the Orchestra’s summer home at The Mann Center for the Performing Arts. Noted for his versatility, Mr. Milanov has built a reputation not only as a conductor of symphonic music.

About the Conductor

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but also as an experienced opera and ballet conductor. His passion for new music has resulted in numerous world premieres of works by composers such as Richard Danielpour, Nicolas Maw and Gabriel Prokofiev, as well as working with emerging composers through Symphony in C’s annual Young Composer’s Competition.

A well-known figure in North America, Mr. Milanov has appeared with the National Symphony Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the symphony orchestras of Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New Jersey and Seattle. He has conducted the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, the Oregon Symphony and the Fort Worth Symphony, and has made festival appearances in Aspen and Chautauqua, as well as with The Philadelphia Orchestra at the Bravo! Vail Valley Festival, The Mann Center and the Saratoga Performing Arts Center.

Internationally, he has collaborated with the BBC Symphony Orchestra London, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande Geneva, the Komische Oper Berlin (Lady Macbeth of Mzensk), the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Residentie Orkest/The Hague, the Lucerne Symphony, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Aalborg Symphony, the National Symphony of Latvia, Orquesta Nacional de Mexico, Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Colombia, the Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de Sao Paulo and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. On his regular tours to the Far East, he has appeared with the NHK Symphony Orchestra Tokyo, the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the China Philharmonic, the Hyogo Performing Arts Center Orchestra and the Singapore Symphony.

As a ballet conductor he has partnered with some of the most influential choreographers of our time, such as Mats Ek at the Zurich Opera; Niels Christie, Maurizio Weinrot and Sabrina Matthews at Stockholm’s Royal Opera and Ballet; Benjamin Millepied and Andonis Foniadakis at the Geneva Opera; and Jorma Elo in Philadelphia.

A committed supporter of youth and music, Mr. Milanov is Music Director of the New Symphony Orchestra in his native city of Sofia, Bulgaria, as well as Symphony in C, which has graduated and placed many of this country’s top instrumentalists. He regularly conducts at the Curtis Institute of Music and appears each season at Carnegie Hall for LinkUP!, a program supported and promoted by The Weill Music Institute reaching more than 15,000 children. He has led tours with the Australian Youth Orchestra and the New Zealand Youth Orchestra, was Music Director of the Chicago Youth Symphony from 1997 to 2001, and has conducted The Juilliard School’s Pre-College Orchestra.

Mr. Milanov’s first commercial recording with The Philadelphia Orchestra, A Grand Celebration: The Philadelphia Orchestra Live with the Wanamaker Organ, was recently released. His live recording of Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 15 and Brahms’ Symphony No. 1 with The Philadelphia Orchestra is available through The Philadelphia Orchestra’s online music store. Other recordings include works of Russian composer Alla Pavlova with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra for Naxos, Argento’s opera Postcard from Morocco with the Curtis Opera Theatre for Albany Records and many recordings with the Bulgarian National Radio Symphony Orchestra available on iTunes. Mr. Milanov studied conducting at The Juilliard School (where he received the Bruno Walter Memorial Scholarship), the Curtis Institute of Music, and has degrees in oboe from Duquesne University and the Bulgarian National Academy of Music. Former Chief Conductor of the Bulgarian National Radio Orchestra (2003–2008), Mr. Milanov is a recipient of the Bulgarian Ministry’s Award for Extraordinary Contribution to Bulgarian Culture and an ASCAP award in 2011 for his programming with the Princeton Symphony Orchestra. In 2005, he was chosen as Bulgaria’s Musician of the Year. He is a passionate cook and often cooks for various charities.