NATIONAL FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
BRAMHS’ 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 imaginitiveness. 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 song cycle with texts drawn from letters (one of them from the famous writer Alexander Solzhеницын 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 (Languente), 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
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.
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.

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