SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS
RENÉE AND HENRY SEGERSTROM CONCERT HALL

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)
Alborada del gracioso

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)
Concerto No. 17 in G Major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 453
Allegro
Andante
Allegretto
Orli Shaham

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)
Don Quixote, TrV 184, Op. 35
Timothy Landauer

Performance begins at 8 p.m.; Preview talk with Alan Chapman begins at 7 p.m.

CARL ST.CLAIR • CONDUCTOR | ORLI SHAHAM • PIANO | TIMOTHY LANDAUER • CELLO

This 2016–17 Piano Soloists are generously sponsored by The Michelle F. Rohé Distinguished Pianists’ Fund.
The Saturday night concert is generously sponsored by the Board of Counselors.
Each of the five movements of Miroirs was dedicated to a member of a rebellious fraternity of young artists and performers known as les Apaches (“the hooligans”), to which Ravel belonged. (The painters known as les Fauves—“the wild beasts”—made their reputation for iconoclasm at the same time.) When the suite was completed in 1905, Ravel applied a personal dedication to each movement; the Alborada honors his friend and supporter M.D. Calvocoressi, a music critic and early supporter of his work.

What to Listen For

The jester is a curious figure who appears throughout European painting and literature. He is Shakespeare’s fool and the commedia dell’arte’s harlequin, the joker in a deck of cards and the graciosos depicted in Spanish paintings and stage comedies. It is his voice we hear in the lovely Alborada del gracioso, awakening to the world with the classless naïvete of the outsider.

The writing is a miracle of fluidity. Played on the piano, it seems to require boneless hands; orchestrated, it flashes with color and light. Hearing either version, we can’t imagine it existing in any other form. The Alborada is full of sun, sea and sounds reminiscent of strummed guitars, all of which bewitched Ravel, here gathered episodically in a way that his biographer Alexis Roland-Manuel described as “the swooning flow of the lovelorn melodic line which interrupts the angry buzzing of guitars.”

Ravel’s love of Spain was a constant in his life from childhood—he grew up near the Spanish border, and his mother sang Spanish lullabies to him from infancy. In that context, Roland-Manuel’s reference to “angry buzzing” seems curious. To some listeners, at least, it sounds proud and emphatic, like Flamenco, as it alternates with the soft breezes of morning. It is also a remarkable example of imitative writing, evoking the staccato spray of Flamenco guitar technique.

Piano Concerto No. 17

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Instrumentation: flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings, solo piano

Performance time: 30 minutes

Background

The most salient and interesting fact about Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 17—and the most charming, at that!—is its nickname, the “starling concerto,” an homage to the composer’s pet starling. The concerto’s celebrated last movement is said to be based on the tuneful whistling of Mozart’s avian pet. Possible?

Well, we know that Mozart purchased a starling on May 27, 1784, less than three weeks before his pupil Barbara Ployer first played this concerto at the house of her uncle, who was Salzburg’s agent at the imperial court in Vienna. We also know that Mozart adored the bird and made much of its musical abilities. Three years later, when it died, Mozart staged a funeral of sufficient pomp and ceremony to rival a state occasion, with veiled mourners and solemn hymns; the composer himself wrote an elegiac poem for the occasion.

But many analyses, including an online account by Meredith J. West and Andrew P. King, conclude that the starling mimicked Mozart’s invented melody, rather than the other way around. When your intrepid annotator consulted an ornithologist on this subject, she confirmed that the species of starling owned by Mozart, sturnus
vulgaris, is a virtual genius of mimicry, with a facility far exceeding that of the more colorful parrot. Mozart is said to have exclaimed “das war schön!” while listening to the beloved bird while working on this concerto. It seems likely that he was admiring its rendition of his own melodies.

By this time Mozart was 28 and had been living in Vienna for about three years. Moving there was a decision he had not taken lightly, and his father, Leopold, looked upon his son’s relocation with some trepidation. There were musical commissions to be secured and lessons to be taught, but to get such work required contending with the petty politics of the Viennese court and aristocracy—something resembling a viper’s nest. Leopold knew all too well his son’s impatience with such matters. So, for that matter, did Amadeus himself. But he was determined to build his career there, and had identified composing and playing piano concertos as a strategy for success. His time in Vienna included some of the most productive years of his brief life, and he would die in that city only seven years later. In 1784 that was a more distant prospect; it was a year of furious activity that included the composition of his Piano Concerto No. 17 and four others, all masterpieces.

When the 25-year-old Mozart arrived in Vienna on March 16, 1781, he was obligated to stay with the entourage of the archbishop of Vienna, sitting at a table above the cooks, but below the valets. Well, most of us have worked for bosses who didn’t appreciate us—though few of us possess talents on the level of Mozart’s. We know from his voluminous, colorful (and sometimes off-color) correspondence with Leopold and with his sister Nannerl that Mozart was quick to feel resentful of those who underestimated him. It should have been a time for Mozart to cultivate and consolidate favor in court, and to line up business elsewhere in Vienna. But professional obligations held over from Salzburg stood in his way, and the archbishop refused to release him from these requirements. His festering irritation made things worse. On one occasion, an evening of entertainment hosted by the archbishop, Mozart supplied a violin rondo, and an aria and a sonata for himself. His compensation was as modest as the program. Had the archbishop released Mozart to perform for the emperor that same evening, he could have earned the equivalent of half his annual salary in Salzburg.

On May 9, matters seemed to reach a climax. According to Mozart, his meeting that day with the archbishop regarding matters of his own melodies prompted a torrent of abuse from the archbishop. When Mozart asked to be discharged, the archbishop refused at first, but was eventually released from Salzburg service “with a kick on my arse... by order of our worthy Prince Archbishop,” as he wrote to Leopold.

When Leopold came to visit his son for 10 weeks in 1785, things were very different. Though Amadeus’ professional standing in Vienna was still subject to petty (and not-so-petty) politics, letters from Leopold to Nannerl show the composer was ensconced in the musical life of the city and in his own household, having married his beloved Constance (another long story, complicated by parental scheming on both sides).

Mozart may have been at pains to show his father an image of prosperous maturity, but he could never have planned the whirlwind of activity that the proud Leopold reported to Nannerl—especially in the face of all his professional commitments. “Since my arrival your brother’s fortepiano has been taken at least a dozen times from the house to the theater or to some other house,” Leopold wrote her. This hectic succession of performances gave Leopold the chance to hear a number of the great concertos his son had composed in 1784. “I had the great pleasure of hearing all the interplay of the instruments so clearly that for sheer delight tears came to my eyes. When your brother left the stage, the emperor tipped his hat and called out ‘Bravo Mozart!’ and when he came on to play, there was a great deal of clapping.”

What to Listen for

Aside from father Leopold’s understandable pride in his son’s musical achievements, the letter to Nannerl reflects the fundamental reality of piano concertos for Mozart (and for Beethoven after him): they were showpieces designed to display skill in composition and performance. Dramatic flair was a plus on both counts, and perhaps for this reason, Mozart’s 1784 concertos generally open with emphatic, military-sounding introductions. The 17th, however, does not follow this pattern. The concerto opens in a relaxed manner, and as its first movement unfolds, its development has a natural, discursive quality. In fact, Mozart includes some features—an emphatic use of the woodwinds and some adventurous, meandering modulations—that sound natural in his hands, but were actually quite unusual for the time.

In the central movement, the strength of the woodwinds continues in an even more unexpected way, with the conventionally dominant string section abruptly withdrawing shortly after the orchestral discourse begins. The concerto’s finale, too, is unusual—built not on a conventional rondo, but rather around five variations on a theme, followed by an energetic presto. Mozart may have had the success of this movement in mind when he composed the equally unusual central movement of his next concerto; it also takes the form of a theme and five variations, eventually arriving at a highly elaborated coda.

Don Quixote

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets (second doubling on E-flat clarinet), bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 6 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, tenor tuba, percussion, harp, wind machine, strings

Performance time: 38 minutes

Background

Dating from the decade before Salome, Strauss’ best-known tone poems are indispensable concert staples today—Don Quixote, Till Eulenspiegel, Don Juan and Ein Heldenleben, to name the most familiar. Also sprach Zarathustra is everywhere now, thanks to the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey. Strauss was in his 30s and still pigeonholed as a “promising young composer” when he wrote these works, and was recognized as a pianist, conductor and technical wizard of harmony. He was born more than 50 years after Richard Wagner, whose revolutionary operas seemed to signal that traditional harmonies were all but played out. But by adding iridescent new layers and unexpected modulations, Strauss expanded old chords to make them do things we never thought they could do. His glittering compositions matched the emotional immediacy of Expressionist painters, but not their abstraction; that was the realm of atonal composers such as Schoenberg and Berg.

What to Listen For

Whether or not Strauss foresaw his reputation’s rise to the ranks of “great” composers, he was never shy about revealing himself in his music, and the picture was generally flattering. The comical mix of courage, bluster and ridiculousness in Don Quixote is the mirror image of the ideal man delineated in Ein Heldenleben (“a hero’s life”);
together they show us the hero that Strauss saw in himself. Add the *Symphonia Domestica* (an orchestral rendering of his home life) and *Intermezzo* (an opera about his marriage) and we have something like a musical memoir.

With their music describing an episodic narrative line, tone poems such as *Don Quixote*, *Til Eulenspiegel* and *Zarathustra* can be enjoyed equally as abstract music or as musical storytelling. But of all of these works, *Don Quixote* might be the most specific in its descriptions—almost like hearing the novel’s incidents without words. Strauss assigns instruments and motifs to the principal characters and their adventures: Don Quixote, with his grandiose dreams of glory that mix humorous self-delusion with touching sincerity (played mainly by a solo cello); Dulcinea, his unreachable romantic ideal, drawn in the plangent strains of the oboe; and Sancho Panza, the sidekick, evoked by bass clarinet and tuba.

Cervantes’ original masterpiece combines old and new elements to create a new literary form. Almost 300 years separate Miguel de Cervantes’ novel *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* and Strauss’ adaptation *Don Quixote*, but in listening to the orchestral tone poem we can hear one master of narrative form reaching across the centuries to another. In this context, the term “tone” takes on a deeper meaning than usual: Strauss’ tone poems, symphonic in scope, capture the nuances of literary tone with precision while also following teasing the episodes into a form that is far more compact.

Compact, yes, but—as always with Strauss—complex, too. Tonal subtlety may be the most remarkable aspect of Strauss’ creation, just as it is in Cervantes’ masterpiece, which is widely considered the first modern novel in world literature. When we first encounter Quixote he puts the error into “knight errant,” and his adventures are foolish and comical; but his steadfastness and integrity, however misplaced, begin to seem admirable and even noble as his questing continues in the face of insurmountable odds. It isn’t his character that’s deepening; rather, it’s Strauss gradually revealing more of his character as we listen.

Through complex harmony, interlocking motifs and densely layered scores, Strauss made this kind of literary layering the very essence of his tone poems. *Also sprach Zarathustra* treads the line between biblical solemnity and sarcasm; *Til Eulenspiegel* rollicks from innocent pranks to gruesome violence and serious punishment. And here, in *Don Quixote*, we start out enjoying picareseque humor tinged with the ridiculous, but as the music progresses we come to know and love the character whose demise ends the tone poem with dignity.

Strauss establishes the musical premises of the narrative through instrumentation. For Quixote he chooses the deeply human voice of the cello, resonant and wine-dark, to represent a knight who was depicted by Cervantes as in his fifties—old to be pursuing knightly adventures, but undaunted in his chivalry. The subordinate voice of the viola depicts his sidekick Sancho Panza, while the tuba provides the touches of whimsy and burlesque that give us the humorous texture of their adventures. We hear pratfalls in the tuba and oafishness in the viola. But if the music sounds funny in its characterizations, Quixote is somehow never the butt of the joke. We can hear his leanness and rectitude in the face of error. It is his squat sire Sancho who sounds rustic and slightly ridiculous.

Don Quixote proceeds through ten variations that depict the knight’s adventures, some of which have entered the common vernacular—none more so than the idea of “tilting at windmills,” which is the subject of the first variation. In this episode, as in most of the others, the humor and drama arise from Magoo-like errors on Quixote’s part: Mistaking windmills for evil giants, he literally and figuratively cannot see what is right in front of him. As the variations continue in like manner—Quixote mistakes a shepherd’s flock of sheep for a massed army and a pilgrims’ procession as a gang of kidnappers—the narrative enables Strauss to give us vividly imitative and atmospheric writing. We hear a waterborne adventure and a moonlit scene; we hear Quixote and Panza drowsing by their campfire. And throughout we hear the solo voice of Quixote’s cello against arrayed forces that are greater than himself, defeating him and destroying his elevated illusions.

So was the Strauss sound old-fashioned, or modern for its day? Both, actually. To his contemporary listeners, Strauss represented a new generation. His harmonies were complex and challenging, and his orchestrations made unprecedented demands of the players. But he was born into the Romantic tradition and was thoroughly schooled in its ways. Many of his compositions have gained popularity and a place in the standard repertory; they sound traditional to us now, but were once criticized with a wide range of complaints. What keeps his musical narrative from sounding merely comical and ridiculous is the pursuit of the ideal of beauty, which for Quixote is embodied in his love for Dulcinea and for Strauss in the pursuit of music itself. *Don Quixote* ends with the knight’s death, once again embodied in the solo voice of the cello. Its sad ruminations are illumined by hints of Dulcinea’s radiance, which endure even after all of Quixote’s adventures have ended in failure. Like Strauss, he remained true to his quest for the most beautiful thing he knew, and in preserving that image of beauty, he retains a nobility that Strauss makes us come to love. Fittingly, Strauss’s adaptation is large in scope—longer than most symphonies—and combines formal elements of symphonic development and the concerto grosso, isolating solo players against a smaller ensemble, all within the larger aural setting of a large, demonstrative orchestra. It leaves us with a sympathetic view of a great literary character, and with a deeper understanding of life’s absurdities.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and Louisiana Philharmonic, and editor-in-chief for The Santa Fe Opera.
The 2016-17 season marks Music Director Carl St. Clair’s 27th year leading Pacific Symphony. He is one of the longest tenured conductors of the major American orchestras. St. Clair’s lengthy history solidifies the strong relationship he has forged with the musicians and the community. His continuing role also lends stability to the organization and continuity to his vision for the Symphony’s future. Few orchestras can claim such rapid artistic development as Pacific Symphony—the largest orchestra formed in the United States in the last 50 years—due in large part to St. Clair’s leadership.

During his tenure, St. Clair has become widely recognized for his musically distinguished performances, his commitment to building outstanding educational programs and his innovative approaches to programming. In April 2018, St. Clair will lead Pacific Symphony in its Carnegie Hall debut, as the finale to yearlong celebration of pre-eminent composer Philip Glass’ 80th birthday. Among St. Clair’s many creative endeavors are: the opera initiative, “Symphonic Voices,” which continues for the sixth season in 2016-17 with Verdi’s Aida, following the concert-opera productions of La Bohème, Tosca, La Traviata, Carmen and Turandot in previous seasons; and the highly acclaimed American Composers Festival, which, now in its 17th year, celebrates the 70th birthday of John Adams with a performance of The Dharma at Big Sur, featuring electric violinist Tracy Silverman, followed by Peter Boyer’s Ellis Island: The Dream of America.

St. Clair’s commitment to the development and performance of new works by composers is evident in the wealth of commissions and recordings by the Symphony. The 2016-17 season features commissions by pianist/composer Conrad Tao and composer-in-residence Narong Prangcharoen, a follow-up to the recent slate of recordings of works commissioned and performed by the Symphony in recent years. These include William Bolcom’s Songs of Lorca and Prometheus (2015-16), Elliot Goldenthal’s Symphony in G-sharp Minor (2014-15), Richard Danielpour’s Toward a Season of Peace (2013-14) Philip Glass’ The Passion of Ramakrishna (2012-13), and Michael Daugherty’s Mount Rushmore and The Gospel According to Sister Aimee (2012-13). St. Clair has led the orchestra in other critically acclaimed albums including two piano concertos of Lukas Foss; Danielpour’s An American Requiem and Goldenthal’s Fire Water Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio with cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Other commissioned composers include James Newton Howard, Zhou Long, Tobias Picker, Frank Ticheli, Chen Yi, Curt Cacioppo, Stephen Scott, Jim Self (Pacific Symphony’s principal tubist) and Christopher Theofanidis.

In 2006-07, St. Clair led the orchestra’s historic move into its home in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall at Segerstrom Center for the Arts. The move came on the heels of the landmark 2005-06 season that included St. Clair leading the Symphony on its first European tour—nine cities in three countries playing before capacity houses and receiving extraordinary responses and reviews.

From 2008-10, St. Clair was general music director for the Komische Oper in Berlin, where he led successful new productions such as La Traviata (directed by Hans Neuenfels). He also served as general music director and chief conductor of the German National Theater and Staatskapelle (GNTS) in Weimar, Germany, where he led Wagner’s Ring Cycle to critical acclaim. He was the first non-European to hold his position at the GNTS; the role also gave him the distinction of simultaneously leading one of the newest orchestras in America and one of the oldest in Europe.

In 2014, St. Clair became the music director of the National Symphony Orchestra in Costa Rica. His international career also has him conducting abroad several months a year, and he has appeared with orchestras throughout the world. He was the principal guest conductor of the Radio Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart from 1998-2004, where he completed a three-year recording project of the Villa–Lobos symphonies. He has also appeared with orchestras in Israel, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South America, and summer festivals worldwide.

In North America, St. Clair has led the Boston Symphony Orchestra (where he served as assistant conductor for several years), New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, Indianapolis, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver symphonies, among many.

A strong advocate of music education for all ages, St. Clair has been essential to the creation and implementation of the Symphony’s education and community engagement programs including Pacific Symphony Youth Ensembles, Heartstrings, Sunday Casual Connections, OC Can You Play With Us?, arts-X-press and Class Act.
consummate musician recognized for her grace and vitality, Orli Shaham has established an impressive international reputation as one of today’s most gifted pianists. Hailed by critics on four continents, Shaham is in demand for her prodigious skills and admired for her interpretations of both standard and modern repertoire. The New York Times called her a "brilliant pianist," The Chicago Tribune recently referred to her as “a first-rate Mozartean” in a performance with the Chicago Symphony and London’s Guardian said Shaham’s playing at the Proms was “perfection.”

Shaham’s performance schedule brings her to concert halls from Carnegie Hall to the Sydney Opera House and most of the major venues in between, for recitals, chamber music and concertos. Shaham has performed with nearly every major American orchestra, as well as many in Europe, Asia and Australia. A frequent guest at summer festivals, her appearances include Tanglewood, Ravinia, Verbier, Mostly Mozart, La Jolla, Music Academy of the West and Aspen. Devoted to the intimate genre of chamber music, Shaham continues to serve as the artistic director for Pacific Symphony’s chamber music series, a position she has held since 2007. She is a featured performer on each of the chamber recitals in the series.

Shaham’s acclaimed 2015 recording, Brahms Inspired, is a collection of new compositions alongside works by Brahms and his compositional forefathers. Other recordings include John Adams’ Grand Pianola Music with the pianist Marc-André Hamelin and the San Francisco Symphony, with the composer conducting, American Grace, a CD of piano music by John Adams and Steven Mackey with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, David Robertson conducting, and Nigunim—Hebrew Melodies, recorded with her brother, the violinist Gil Shaham.

Driven by a passion to bring classical music to new audiences, Shaham maintains an active parallel career as a respected broadcaster, music writer and lecturer. On radio, she has hosted the nationally broadcast “Dial-a-Musician” and “America’s Music Festivals” series, and served as artist in residence on National Public Radio’s Performance Today. Inspired by her enthusiasm for introducing young children to the pleasures of music, Shaham created “Baby Got Bach,” a series of interactive classical concerts for young children.

Timothy Landauer was hailed “a cellist of extraordinary gifts” by The New York Times when he won the coveted Concert Artists Guild International Award in 1983. Landauer is the winner of numerous prestigious prizes and awards, among them the Young Musicians Foundation’s National Gregor Piatigorsky Memorial Cello Award, the Samuel Applebaum Grand Prize of the National Solo Competition of the American String Teacher’s Association and the 1984 Hammer-Rostropovich Scholarship Award.

Landauer’s extensive engagements include his highly acclaimed recitals at Carnegie Recital Hall, the Ambassador Auditorium in Los Angeles, the Orford Arts Center in Montreal, the City Hall Theatre in Hong Kong and in Hannover, Germany. He has performed as a soloist with orchestras across three continents: they include the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra, the Gulbenkian Orchestra in Lisbon, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Taiwan National Symphony, the Beijing Symphony and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. In the United States, Landauer has also appeared with the Maryland Symphony, the Grand Teton Festival Orchestra and Pacific Symphony.

Landauer was the recipient of “The Outstanding Individual Artist Award 2004” presented by Arts Orange County, and currently holds the Catherine and James Emmi Chair. He is also an avid radio control modeler in the areas of fast electric race boats and air crafts.

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