

PROGRAMME NOTES
PPO 35th CONCERT SEASON: SERIES I

GIOACCHINO ROSSINI (1792-1868)

Overture to “Il Viaggio A Rheims” (*The Journey to Rheims*)

This work is not actually the Overture to the opera but a readaptation of the dances from “Le Siege de Corinthe” (The Siege of Corinth). It was reassembled after rediscovery just before its first modern performance in Pesaro (Rossini’s birthplace), Italy on August 18, 1984 with Claudio Abbado conducting.

The opera was written to celebrate the coronation of Charles X of France in 1825. Without any intention of performing it further after the coronation, Rossini later put the original score aside while modifying it to create a new music for “Count Ory” three years later. Musicologists however put the original score back in the 1970’s during which time some valuable musical ideas were discovered.

The opera itself presents a diverse group of international upper class cognoscenti who find themselves stranded on their way to Rheims to attend the coronation of Charles X of France. While staying at the Giglio d’Oro, various mishaps occur such as missing luggage, delayed arrival of carriage horses, cancellation of the trip to Rheims, and finally the news of a consolation party celebration in Paris for non-attendees to the coronation. There was hardly a semblance of a plot as the characters presented their own divergent backgrounds unrelated to each other. This diversity could be discerned as the opera is replete with duets, arias, and vocal ensembles.

A stately opening in E-flat presents an oboe solo melody, followed by the clarinet, flute, and bassoon. The characteristic Rossini Overture style is recognized as the strings enter in a light-hearted harmonic fashion punctuated by grace notes and brisk thirds in the high register as intensity gradually increases through dynamic change with every motivic repetition.

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat

The first of three piano concertos of the legendary pianist-composer Franz Liszt, initially sketched in 1830 but premiered much later in 1855, contains four short sections practically bound together into one continuous movement.

A bold opening orchestral statement that acts as the principal theme is immediately interrupted by brisk double octaves and scalar runs by the piano, much of which would be recurring throughout the piece. Several modulations of the theme mark the first section which fades away in a chromatic scale of sixths. The second section contains a placid and soulful melody that later develops into a brief bitter resolution of diminished chords before settling

down into a flute motive accompanied by the piano's prolonged trills in the high register. The third dance-like section is introduced by the triangle that occupies an interesting central role. Its unique treatment by the composer earned the piece its nickname as the "Triangle Concerto". The piece ends with the fourth section replete with brilliant runs and massive chords, often containing the patterns of the previous motives and technical passages.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

The most popular of the three symphonies of Sergei Rachmaninoff, this symphony was composed between 1906 and 1907 and received its premiere on January 26, 1908. After a disastrous and ill-received premiere of the First Symphony, Rachmaninoff became chronically depressed and practically abandoned all attempts to compose another work. However, through the prodding of a friend, he consented to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Nikolas Dahl, whose treatment through hypnosis brought him back the enthusiasm to compose again. He soon finished work on the popular Piano Concerto no. 2, playing the solo part during its triumphal premiere while dedicating the work to Dr. Dahl. He later resumed work on the Second Symphony after five years, whose sketches he had earlier abandoned.

The first movement highlights the composer's mastery of extended paragraphs through long motivic phrases, as well as a carefully controlled suspense where harmonic build-ups are cut short before reaching climactic proportions. The second movement is a scherzo with a brisk string ostinato introduction that sets the pace for the entry of the wind and brass motives. Lush passages and harmonic progressions are complemented by a Dies Irae melody which the composer also used for his "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini" and the "Isle of the Dead". The lovely third movement, an Adagio, pits an extended clarinet solo that later develops into a dialogue between clarinet and violin, while the Finale movement creates a festive atmosphere with the ringing of bells, sweeping runs and definitive cadences. A powerful and majestic Coda closes the hour-long opus.

The Symphony no. 2 has been increasingly used in orchestral concerts around the world due to its beautiful craftsmanship as well as melodic and harmonic richness. It was later recognized in Russia when it won the prestigious Glinka Prize that enabled it to make the global rounds. As with the Piano Concerto No. 2, this Symphony has also attracted a number of popular songs that borrowed its themes.