

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Don Quixote, Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character, Op. 35 (1897)

RICHARD STRAUSS ■ 1864-1949

Don Quixote by Cervantes is not only among the earliest examples of the novel in world literature (1605), but also one of the most admired and widely enjoyed. Cervantes sketched his hero thus: “Through little sleep and much reading, he dried up his brains in such sort as he wholly lost his judgment.” Thereupon, “He fell into one of the strangest conceits that a madman ever stumbled on in this world ... that he should become a knight-errant, and go throughout the world with his horse and armor to seek adventures and practice in person all he had read was used by knights of yore....”

Knights in shining armor were as much out of fashion in Cervantes’ day as covered wagons and the pony express are in ours, but the nostalgic, historical romance that they represent is the source of much of the poignancy that *Don Quixote* elicits and that served as the emotional engine for Richard Strauss’ tone poem of 1897, as well as for works by some sixty other composers, including Telemann and Purcell. In his setting, Strauss chose to emphasize the dramatic elements of the tale by assigning a theme representing Quixote to the solo cello, and then varying the melody to depict several episodes from the novel. Along for the adventure, as well as much abuse from his master, is the faithful squire, Sancho Panza, usually played by solo

viola, but also given to the tenor tuba and the bass clarinet.

Strauss’ tone poem portrays ten of Quixote’s exploits. *Introduction*: The elderly hero’s fancy teems with the “impossible follies” of the romantic works he has been reading and in his madness he vows that he will become a knight-errant. *Theme*: *Don Quixote, the Knight of the Rueful Countenance; Sancho Panza*. The theme of the hero is announced by the solo cello. Sancho Panza’s theme emerges first in the bass clarinet, then in the tenor tuba, and later in the solo viola. *Variation I. The Knight and his Squire Start on Their Journey*. Inspired by the beautiful Dulcinea of Toboso, the Knight attacks some “monstrous giants,” who are nothing more than windmills revolving in the breeze. *Variation II. The Victorious Battle Against the Host of the Great Emperor Alifanfaron*. Quixote spies a huge army but it is only a great herd of sheep. The Knight is stoned by the shepherds. *Variation III. Colloquies of Knight and Squire*. Quixote speaks of honor, glory, the Ideal Woman. Sancho, the realist, holds forth for a more comfortable life. *Variation IV. The Adventure with the Penitents*. Mistaking a band of pilgrims for robbers and villains, Don Quixote attacks, only to receive a sound drubbing from them. *Variation V. The Knight’s Vigil*. Don Quixote spurns sleep. Dulcinea, in answer to his prayers, comes to him in a vision. *Variation VI. The Meeting with Dulcinea*. Jestingly, Sancho points to a country wench as Dulcinea. Don Quixote vows vengeance against the wicked magician who has wrought this transfor-

mation. *Variation VII. The Ride Through the Air.* Blindfolded, Knight and squire sit astride a wooden horse, which — they have been informed — will carry them aloft. The wooden horse never leaves the ground. *Variation VIII. The Journey to the Enchanted Park.* Quixote and Sancho embark in an oarless boat. The boat capsizes, but the two reach shore and give thanks for their safety. *Variation IX. The Combat with Two Magicians.* Quixote violently charges a peaceable pair of monks going by on their mules. In his maddened brain, the monks are mighty magicians, and Quixote is elated beyond measure at their utter rout. *Variation X. The Duel with the Knight of the White Moon.* The greatest setback of his knightly career is suffered by Quixote at the hands of the Knight of the White Moon, who is, after all, a true friend. He explains that he hoped to cure Don Quixote of his madness, and, having won the duel, orders him to retire peacefully to his home. *Finale. The Death of Don Quixote.* The worn and harried Knight is no longer bemused. It was all vanity, he reflects, and he is prepared, now, for the peace that is death.

Overture to *Don Giovanni*, K. 527 (1787)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART ■ 1756-1791

The Marriage of Figaro played in Prague for the first time in December of 1786; it was a smash hit. When Mozart visited the city the following month for further performances of the opera, Pasquale Bondini, the manager of Italian opera at the National Theater and the local producer of *Figaro*, commissioned him to write a new piece for the considerable sum of 100 ducats, equal to 12.1 ounces of gold bullion. As soon as Mozart returned to Vienna in Febru-

ary, he asked Lorenzo da Ponte, creator of the masterful libretto for *Figaro*, to write the book for the new opera. Da Ponte suggested the subject of Don Juan; Mozart agreed. Mozart worked throughout the late summer on the score, and left for Prague with his wife, Constanze, on October 1, 1787. The premiere of *Don Giovanni* was a triumph exceeded in Prague only by the wild success of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

“Everything in this tremendous introduction breathes terror and inspires awe,” wrote the French composer Charles Gounod of the opening of the *Don Giovanni Overture*. These august preludial strains, the only music from the opera heard in the overture, later accompany the graveyard scene, during which the statue of the Commendatore, whom Giovanni has slain in the first scene, comes chillingly to life. Giovanni invites the specter to dinner. The Commendatore consequently appears at Giovanni’s banquet and carries the unrepentant libertine to Hell. The remainder of the overture follows traditional sonata form, heightened in expression by a sizeable central development section of considerable emotional weight.

Suites Nos. 1 and 2 from *Carmen* (1872-1875)

GEORGES BIZET ■ 1838-1875

Carmen, Prosper Mérimée’s earthy novella of 1845, was an unlikely subject for Georges Bizet to have chosen for representation at the Opéra-Comique, whose bourgeois works had accustomed the theater’s audiences to lighthearted, happy-ending stories disposed in breezy musical numbers separated by spoken dialogue. Heroism, tragedy and recitative were reserved for the hallowed environs of the Paris Opéra. Even though Bizet

and his librettists, Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, smoothed the edges of the story and the characters (Carmen was little more than a raw prostitute in Mérimée's novella), critics and audience were bemused by the tragic progression of its plot, the depth of its characterization, the lubriciousness of its emotions, and the cumulative power of its impact at the opera's premiere on March 3, 1875. Though *Carmen* did not initially achieve the success Bizet had hoped for, neither was it the fiasco that some legends later made of it. It was retained in the Opéra-Comique repertory, and given 35 times before the end of the 1875 season and thirteen the next, though Bizet died in Paris exactly three months after the premiere, knowing little of the opera's success. *Carmen* then was produced to much acclaim across Europe and in America (first at New York's Academy of Music on October 23, 1878), and by the time that it was revived at the Opéra-Comique, in 1883, the original spoken dialogue had been replaced with composed recitatives by the New Orleans-born composer Ernest Guiraud. *Carmen* was invariably performed in this through-composed version until Bizet's original score again came to light in the 1960s.

With their abundance of melody, exotic Spanish milieu and vivid orchestral colors, excerpts from *Carmen* have long been concert-hall favorites. "If you want to learn how to orchestrate," counseled Richard Strauss, a master of symphonic sonority, "don't study Wagner's scores, study *Carmen*.... It is sheer perfection. What wonderful economy, how every note is in its proper place." Several of the most popular excerpts have been gathered together into two orchestral suites for concert performance.

ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

FEBRUARY 10-11, 2024

8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Don Quixote for Cello, Viola and Orchestra, Op. 35 RICHARD STRAUSS

Introduction

Theme: Don Quixote, Knight of the Rueful Countenance; Sancho Panza

Variation I: The Knight and the Squire Start on their Journey

Variation II: The Victorious Battle Against the Host of the

Great Emperor Alifanfaron

Variation III: Colloquies of Knight and Squire

Variation IV: The Adventure with the Penitents

Variation V: The Knight's Vigil

Variation VI: The Meeting with Dulcinea

Variation VII: The Ride Through the Air

Variation VIII: The Journey to the Enchanted Park

Variation IX: The Combat with Two Magicians

Variation X: The Duel with the Knight of the White Moon

Finale: The Death of Don Quixote

LUIGI PIOVANO, Cello

CYNTHIA PHELPS, Viola

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Overture to *Don Giovanni*, K. 527 WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Suite from *Carmen*

GEORGES BIZET

Prelude to Act I

The Changing of the Guard (Children's Chorus from Act 1)

Habanera (Act I)

Seguidilla (Act I)

The Dragoons of Alcalá (Prelude to Act II)

Danse Bohème (Act II)

Song of the Toreador (Act II)

Nocturne (Micaëla's Aria from Act III)

Prelude to Act I (reprise)

Aragonaise (Prelude to Act IV)

The Toreadors (Act IV)

Prelude to Act I (reprise)

The Toreadors (reprise)