

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Overture for Orchestra (1932)

GERMAINE TAILLEFERRE ■ 1892-1983

Germaine Tailleferre is best remembered as the sole female member of *Les Six*, the informal association of young French composers in the early 1920s who derived their inspiration and artistic credo of wit, insouciance and clear-eyed expression from Eric Satie and Jean Cocteau. Tailleferre had to overcome the objections of her parents to pursue a musical career before she could enroll in the Paris Conservatoire for preliminary studies in 1904; later, as a degree student, she won first prizes in harmony, solfège, counterpoint and accompaniment. While at the Conservatoire, she met three musical Young Turks — Georges Auric, Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud — who introduced her to Satie. In 1916, she and her fellow iconoclasts formed *Les Nouveaux Jeunes* (“*The New Young People*”) to promote their music and ideas, and they gave their first concert at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris early in 1918. Tailleferre contributed a string quartet to the venture. Later that year, a French journalist added Francis Poulenc and Louis Durey to the coterie of Milhaud, Honegger, Auric and Tailleferre to form *Les Six*.

Tailleferre went on to become one of Maurice Ravel’s few students, and she composed throughout her long life with the precision and care for detail that mark that master’s works. During World War II, she lived in New York City, but returned to her homeland when peace was restored, and died in Paris in 1983.

Though she experimented with modernist techniques in a few of her later compositions, Tailleferre composed largely in the lucid and restrained manner of Fauré and Ravel.

Tailleferre wrote her *Overture for Orchestra* as a *jeu d’esprit* in 1932; it was premiered in Paris on Christmas Day. In 1951, she used the work to open her opéra-bouffe *Il était un petit navire* (“*There Was a Little Boat*”), to a libretto by Henri Jeanson. The Overture begins with a saucy theme; the woodwinds present the second subject. The brief center section includes a salutation to the waltzes of Offenbach before the Overture returns to its opening music, modified, to round out its form.

Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra in C minor, Op. 37 (1797-1803)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN ■ 1770-1827

By 1803, Emanuel Schickaneder, the colorful character who figured so prominently in the closing pages of Mozart’s life as the librettist and producer of *The Magic Flute*, had taken over the management of Vienna’s Theater-an-der-Wien. His house was locked in a fierce competitive battle with the court-subsidized Kärntnertheater, run by Baron Peter von Braun. When von Braun hired the distinguished Luigi Cherubini as resident composer, Schickaneder felt obliged to counter with his own music master, and he approached Beethoven with an offer. Beethoven, who had felt the need to write for the stage for some

time, accepted gladly — especially since the job carried free lodgings in the theater as part of the compensation. He and Schickaneder dutifully plowed through a small library of possibilities for an operatic subject, but none inspired Beethoven until he took up work on *Fidelio* late in 1803.

In the meantime, Beethoven took advantage of his theatrical connection to put some of his instrumental works on display. Since opera was forbidden in Catholic countries during Lent at that time, the Theater-an-der-Wien was available for concerts in the early spring, and Beethoven scheduled such an event during April 1803. It had been fully three years since he last presented a concert entirely of his own orchestral music, and he had several scores that were awaiting their first presentations, including the Second Symphony, the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* and the Third Piano Concerto. He programmed all of these, and, for good measure, tossed in the First Symphony, which had been premiered at his concert three years earlier.

Beethoven proceeded enthusiastically with plans for the concert, working right up to the last minute putting finishing touches on the new compositions. (His pupil Ferdinand Ries found him in bed writing trombone parts for the oratorio only three hours before the rehearsal began.) He had only a single rehearsal on the concert day for this wealth of unfamiliar music, and public and critical response to the concert was lukewarm, undoubtedly due in large part to an inadequate performance. Beethoven, however, was delighted to have played his music for the Viennese public, and he was becoming recognized more for his ability as a composer than as a pianist.

The Third Concerto's first movement opens with the longest introductory

orchestral tutti in Beethoven's concertos. The strings in unison present the main theme; the lyrical second theme is sung by violins and clarinet in a contrasting major mode. The closely reasoned development section grows inexorably from thematic fragments heard in the exposition. The recapitulation begins with a forceful restatement of the main theme by the full orchestra. The second movement is a nocturne of tender sentiments and quiet moods. Though analysis reveals its form to be a three-part structure (A-B-A), it is in spirit simply an extended song — a marvelous juxtaposition of hymnal tranquility and sensuous operatic love scene. The traditional, Classical rondo was a form of simple, high spirits meant to send the audience away in a bubbling mood. Mozart, in his late concertos, had begun to explore the emotional depth possible with the rondo, and in this Third Concerto, Beethoven continued that search. He incorporated elements of sonata design into the finale to lend it additional weight, even inserting a fugal passage in the second episode. Only in the closing pages is the dark world of C minor abandoned for a vivacious romp through C major to close this wonderful work of Beethoven's early maturity.

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45 (1940)

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF ■ 1873-1943

World War I was inevitably a trial for Rachmaninoff and his countrymen, but his most severe personal adversity came when the 1917 Revolution smashed the aristocratic society of Russia — the only world he had ever known. He was forced to flee his beloved country for America and he pined for his homeland the rest of his life. He did his best to keep the old

language, food, customs and holidays alive in his own household, “but it was at best synthetic,” wrote American musicologist David Ewen. “Away from Russia, which he could never hope to see again, he always felt lonely and sad, a stranger even in lands that were ready to be hospitable to him. His homesickness assumed the character of a disease, and one symptom of that disease was an unshakable melancholy.” By 1940, when he composed the *Symphonic Dances*, he was worried about his daughter Tatiana, who was trapped in France by the German invasion (he never saw her again), and had been weakened by a minor operation in May. He nevertheless felt the need to compose for the first time since the Third Symphony of 1936, and the *Symphonic Dances* were written quickly that summer. Still, it was the man and not the setting that was expressed in this music — “I try to make music speak directly that which is in my heart at the time I am composing,” he said. “If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, they become part of my music.”

The first of the *Symphonic Dances*, in a large three-part form (A–B–A), is spun from a tiny three-note descending motive heard at the beginning. The middle portion is given over to a folk-like melody initiated by the alto saxophone. The return of the opening section, with its distinctive falling motive, rounds out the first movement. The waltz of the second movement is more rugged and deeply expressive than the Viennese variety. The finale begins with a sighing introduction for the winds, which leads into a section in quicker tempo. The movement accumulates rhythmic energy as it progresses and virtually explodes into the last pages, a coda based on an ancient Russian Orthodox chant.

ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

OCTOBER 15-16, 2022
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Overture for Orchestra

GERMAINE TAILLEFERRE

Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra
in C minor, Op. 37

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Allegro con brio

Largo

Rondo: Allegro

Eric Lu, Piano

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

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Non allegro

Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)

Lento assai — Allegro vivace — Lento assai — Allegro vivace