



**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY
A JACOBS MASTERWORKS CONCERT**

February 6, 7 and 8, 2015

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART/ ORCH. RICHARD STRAUSS **Overture to *Idomeneo*, K. 366**

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART **Clarinet Concerto in A Major, K. 622**
Allegro
Adagio
Rondo: Allegro
Sheryl Renk, clarinet

INTERMISSION

RICHARD STRAUSS ***Tod und Verklärung* (Death and Transfiguration), Op. 24**

RICHARD STRAUSS ***Vier letzte Lieder* (Four Last Songs)**
Frühling (Spring)
September
Beim Schlafengehen (At Bedtime)
Im Abendrot (At Sunset)
Nicole Cabell, soprano

PROGRAM NOTE

Overture to *Idomeneo*, K. 366

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (ORCH. RICHARD STRAUSS)

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna

In the summer of 1780 Mozart received a commission from the city of Munich for a new opera to be produced during their winter carnival season. The commission was welcome – Munich promised a larger and more sophisticated world than Mozart found in dreary Salzburg – and he had set to work on the opera even before he left for Munich on November 5. Once in that city, Mozart worked carefully with the singers to compose music suitable to their voices.

Idomeneo, an opera seria in three acts, was first produced in Munich on January 29, 1781, and was well-received then and at two subsequent performances. Mozart himself was quite pleased with it, but *Idomeneo* quickly dropped out of sight and was not revived until the twentieth century – the first performance in the United States did not take place until 1947.

Set in the aftermath of the Trojan War as the Greek warriors return home, *Idomeneo* tells of Idomeneus, King of Crete, who is shipwrecked. Facing death in the storm, he promises Neptune that if the god will save him, he will sacrifice the first thing he sees on his return home, and the first person Idomeneus encounters is his son Idamantes. The opera recounts the struggle to confront and resolve this grim situation, and for it Mozart wrote powerful, expressive music.

Mozart had a big orchestra available to him in Munich: pairs of woodwinds, pairs of trumpets and four horns, timpani and strings; he used that orchestra to create a grand and powerful sound. (It should also be noted that *Idomeneo* marked Mozart's first use of clarinets in an opera.) The overture, marked simply *Allegro*, gets off to a powerful beginning with fanfare-like figures from the entire orchestra. This is quickly answered by a low and growling figure in the strings that will be associated with sacrifice during the opera before the orchestra resumes the shining mood of the beginning. The landscape clouds over briefly for the second subject in A minor, a poised theme that suggests that all ahead may not be well. Here are two powerful and beautifully contrasted themes, perfect for sonata form, but Mozart chooses not to explore their possibilities: he eliminates the development section entirely, simply repeats those two themes and proceeds directly into the opera.

This may explain why so dramatic an overture has so quiet an ending. The opera itself

will open with an aria from Ilia, a Trojan princess taken captive during the war and now in love with Idamantes – she laments the destruction of Troy and the hopelessness of her love. Rather than bringing his overture a dramatic conclusion, Mozart winds it down very precisely, and that quiet ending makes a perfect lead-in to Ilia’s opening lament.

Clarinet Concerto in A Major, K. 622

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

In Vienna Mozart became friends with Anton Stadler (1753-1812), a fellow Freemason and a virtuoso clarinetist; for Stadler he wrote three great works that feature clarinet: the Clarinet Trio, K. 498 (1786), the Clarinet Quintet, K. 581 (1789) and the Clarinet Concerto, K. 622, composed during the final weeks of Mozart’s life. Stadler played the basset clarinet, an instrument of his own invention, which could play four pitches lower than the standard clarinet of Mozart's day. This unfortunately resulted in a number of corrupt editions of Mozart’s clarinet works, for later editors re-wrote them to suit the range of the standard clarinet. Subsequent modifications have given the A clarinet those four low pitches, and today we hear these works in the key in which Mozart originally intended them.

The final months of Mozart’s life were furiously busy, particularly the month of September 1791, when two of his operas (both barely finished in time) had their premieres: *La clemenza di Tito* in Prague and *The Magic Flute* in Vienna. In the first week of October, while overseeing the initial run of *The Magic Flute*, Mozart wrote the Clarinet Concerto, completing it on October 7, only 59 days before his death. It is of course tempting to discover premonitions of death in Mozart’s final instrumental work, and many critics have been unable to resist that temptation, but such conclusions must remain subjective. What we can hear in the Clarinet Concerto is some of the most graceful, noble and moving music Mozart ever wrote. This is not a concerto that sets out to dazzle a listener’s ears with the soloist’s fiery technique (it has no cadenza) but rather is music that through its endless beauty engages a listener’s heart. Mozart’s subdued orchestration (pairs of flutes, bassoons and horns, plus strings) produces a gentle and smooth sonority, ideal for the sound of the clarinet and for the restraint of the music itself.

The emotional center of this concerto is the *Adagio*. It is in this movement that one feels most strongly the concerto’s compelling combination of surface restraint and emotional depth; if

one needs to hear premonitions of Mozart's death, this movement's intensity and spirit of gentle resignation offer the place to look. Mozart frames the *Adagio* with two more animated movements. The spacious *Allegro*, one of Mozart's longest symphonic movements, establishes the concerto's spirit immediately with its calm and lyrical opening idea, while the rondo finale – full of athletic skips throughout the clarinet's range – breathes the same air of graceful serenity.

Tod und Verklärung (Death and Transfiguration), Op. 24

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born June 11, 1864, Munich

Died September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

In the summer of 1888, the 24-year-old Richard Strauss completed *Don Juan*, a tone poem on the Lisztian model that detailed the adventures and dark fate of that legendary lover. *Don Juan* is a masterpiece – and it made Strauss' reputation – but even before it was performed he had set to work on another tone poem, one with a far more ambitious topic. *Death and Transfiguration* would take for its subject the death-struggle of a human soul (apparently an artist) and the triumphant realization – after his death – of the ideals that had animated his life. Such subjects were in the air as the nineteenth century neared its close: while Strauss was composing *Death and Transfiguration*, his friend Gustav Mahler was writing his *Resurrection* Symphony which would depict the same transmigration of a soul. (It comes as no surprise to learn that Mahler was strongly attracted to *Death and Transfiguration* and conducted it many times.) Strauss completed his new tone poem in the fall of 1889 and led the first performance at Eisenach on June 21, 1890.

Death and Transfiguration was an immediate success (it clearly struck a chord in audiences a century ago), but those same audiences wanted to know more completely what was “happening” in this music, and so in 1894 Strauss responded with a detailed scenario of the “events” of his tone poem:

It was six years ago that it occurred to me to present in the form of a tone poem the dying hours of a man who had striven towards the highest idealistic aims, maybe indeed those of an artist. The sick man lies in bed, asleep, with heavy irregular breathing; friendly dreams conjure a smile on the features of the deeply suffering man; he wakes up; he is once more racked with horrible agonies; his limbs shake with fever – as the attack passes

and the pains leave off, his thoughts wander through his past life; his childhood passes before him, the time of his youth with its strivings and passions and then, as the pains already begin to return, there appears to him the fruit of his life's path, the conception, the ideal which he has sought to realize, to present artistically, but which he has not been able to complete, since it is not for man to be able to accomplish such things. The hour of death approaches, the soul leaves the body in order to find gloriously achieved in everlasting space those things which could not be fulfilled here below.

Strauss' description is so detailed – and his musical scene-painting so exact – that it is possible to follow this scenario exactly across the span of *Death and Transfiguration*. Strauss builds this music on a series of brief themes or motifs that represent the events of his protagonist's life. The man is already on his deathbed when the music begins in dark C minor. Halting figures for strings and timpani suggest the irregular beat of his heart, while the violins' sighs echo his troubled breathing. A soaring oboe solo (Strauss marks it *Very tender*) recalls the events of the man's childhood, but these fond memories are cut short as death – a sinuous, surging figure for low strings and winds – makes an ominous entrance, boiling up out of the depths to overwhelm his waning energies. The dying man, though, gathers his strength and fights back; heroic chords for full orchestra stamp out his resolution, and in their aftermath Strauss introduces the noble, striving theme (built on an octave leap) that symbolizes the artist's ideals, the principles by which he has tried to live. This figure will later become the transfiguration music, but now Strauss makes a detour to recall the events of the artist's young manhood. Here the music moves into E-flat Major and takes on an impressive swagger, particularly as stamped out by the horns – it is a measure of young Strauss' skill that this heroic music has been subtly derived from the dying man's memories of childhood. This section drives to an impressive climax as the combined violin sections flash downward and streak back up in a blazing gesture that symbolizes his youthful resolve (and which is also a fabulously difficult passage for the violins).

But once again death intrudes, and this time – over the sound of the man's wildly beating heart – it overwhelms him. Death's triumph takes the form of a ghostly upward glissando, like a final breath, and Strauss uses soft strokes on the tam-tam to eerie effect here. In their aftermath, the theme of the artist's ideals returns and gradually grows in strength to become a triumphant

affirmation of his life. The music builds to a grand restatement of the transfiguration theme and finds fulfillment (and peace) in the golden C Major glow of its closing pages.

***Vier letzte Lieder* (Four Last Songs)**

RICHARD STRAUSS

Richard Strauss rocketed to international fame as a very young man with his tone poems and early operas, and then, as he grew older and music changed around him, he seemed to fade from sight. On the occasion of Strauss' 70th birthday in 1934, the English critic Eric Blom could airily dismiss him by saying that "over the last three decades he has been, it must be said, in a decline," and a music appreciation text of that same era actually had to remind its readers that "at this writing [Strauss] is still very much alive." Then came the catastrophe of World War II. At 75 years of age when the war began, Strauss remained in Germany and watched in horror as Allied bombing destroyed every symbol of German culture. After the firebombing of Dresden, the aged Strauss agonized: "I too am in a mood of despair! The Goethehaus, the world's greatest sanctuary, destroyed! My beautiful Dresden – Weimer – Munich, all gone!"

When the war ended, Strauss and his wife went to Switzerland while the composer – who had held a minor musical post under the Third Reich – waited to be cleared by de-Nazification courts. Now, in his 80s, Strauss felt a new stirring of creative energy, and he came upon a poem that had special meaning to him: *Im Abendrot* by Joseph Eichendorff (1798-1857), about an aging couple facing the end of their lives. He completed a setting of this poem for soprano and orchestra in May 1948, just before his 84th birthday. But he did not want this song to stand alone, and by good fortune he had just been given a copy of the complete poems of Herman Hesse (1877-1962). Hesse, who had recently received the Nobel Prize, is best known to American audiences today as the author of the novel *Steppenwolf*. Strauss selected three of Hesse's poems and across the summer of 1948 also set them for soprano and orchestra.

When Strauss was cleared by the courts and allowed to return to Munich in May 1949, he brought with him the manuscripts of these four songs; they were the last music he would ever write. But Strauss had not decided on a title for them, he made no suggestion about the order in which they should be performed, and he never heard them – he died four months later, in September. The first performance took place six months after that, on May 22, 1950, in London,

when they were sung by Kirsten Flagstad.

The *Four Last Songs*, as they have come to be known, are glorious music. In his old age, surrounded by destruction and annihilation, Strauss faces the imminence of death, but he does this without the agony that a Mahler or Shostakovich would have brought to the subject. Instead, these songs are suffused with a sense of calm, of acceptance, of fullness; one comes away from this music not depressed but consoled and moved by the beauty of Strauss' vision. Part of the strength of the *Four Last Songs* comes from what has been called "Strauss' lifelong love affair with the soprano voice." He writes beautifully for soprano, and these settings demand a singer with a soaring, powerful voice and the intelligence to project the depth and variety of moods here. Some of the effectiveness of these songs comes from their sequence, which was decided by an editor, a sequence that places *Im Abendrot* (At Sunset) – the first song to be composed – at the very end. The published sequence makes good sense emotionally: the four songs move from spring through the decay of summer and on to the appeal of sleep and finally conclude with sunset, which here becomes the metaphor for both fullness and death.

Briefest of the songs, *Frühling* (Spring) has a particularly effective beginning. The text speaks of a longing for spring, and Strauss keeps the orchestra and the soprano in their dark lower registers for the beginning, then lets the voice soar at the arrival of that shining season. *September* catches the year at a moment of fullness – it is a season of golden sunlight but with just a touch of the cool breezes that remind us of what is to follow. Strauss' setting sparkles with the glistening sound of harps and high violins as the vocal line shimmers high above. After a climax that celebrates the fullness of this moment, Strauss leaves it to the golden sound of the solo French horn to draw the song to its quiet close.

The tone changes perceptibly at *Beim Schlafengehen* (At Bedtime) as the soul longs to sleep and to be encircled by night. The music rises out of the orchestral depths, and the soprano's song is now calmer, more resigned; soon Strauss twines her voice beautifully into the ornate line of the orchestra's violins. He makes an effective choice here: the first two verses pass quickly, but between the second and third stanzas comes an extended violin solo, its long melodic arch leading us from the desire for sleep into the final stanza where the soul plunges into the night.

The cycle reaches fulfillment in the final song, *Im Abendrot*, which was the first to be composed. Its opening minute may well be the most beautiful music Strauss (or anyone else!)

ever composed. The song opens with what is almost an eruption, a great explosion of E-flat Major sound, and then the upper strings soar along what seems an endless flow of melody. The music seems to glow, to shine, in front of us, but within it are bittersweet flickerings of darkness that remind us what this song is about. An aged couple – who have together made it through a life of joys and sorrows – stands hand-in-hand facing sunset. Around them, the light darkens and the air grows cool, and in the distance we hear the song of larks (trilling flutes), here the symbol of death. Yet at the end of their long lives, this couple faces death with calm, and it is almost with surprise that one of them asks in the final line: “Is this perchance death?” Strauss underlines the meaning of the song (and the entire cycle) by quoting at just this point the transfiguration theme of his tone poem *Death and Transfiguration*, composed 60 years earlier. In that tone poem, this climbing, aspiring theme had symbolized the fulfillment of the soul in death, and in his final work that same theme returns to make the same statement. As distant larks trill in the cool air, light and music fade into nothingness.

-Program notes by Eric Bromberger

WHY THIS PROGRAM?

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“Since planning this concert, I have been waiting impatiently for the dates to perform it.” Our Music Director Jahja Ling waxed very enthusiastically about this program, continuing, “Putting these two, closely related pieces by Richard Strauss together in sequence is the best way to get to inside of the composer, where he was seriously considering death, first as a relatively young man, and then seeing it appear closer and closer in his old age. There was an early anticipation and then a much later, closer reflection on it. In the final song, in which the introduction presents what may be the most beautiful music Strauss ever wrote, he recapitulates the great transfiguration music of the earlier tone poem, which the audience will have just heard. That completes the maturing cycle of the composer's reflection, music that is almost divine inspiration. And before that, the concertmaster's marvelous violin solo in the third song is certainly the most beautiful music Strauss wrote for solo violin....”

Maestro Ling also expressed considerable love for the other composer represented here, Mozart: “...always a great pairing with Strauss.” He believes that the Clarinet Concerto may be

the most mature of the great composer's many works, and not only because it is one of his final pieces. "The second movement's beauty is especially profound, almost heavenly. Principal Clarinet Sheryl Renk is, of course, one of our own stars, and she always delivers maximal musical feeling as well as technique, combined with great expression. I just can't wait for this concert!"

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Mozart's overture to a very dramatic opera, *Idomeneo*, has never before been played by the San Diego Symphony Orchestra. In contrast, the masterful Clarinet Concerto by the same composer was first played here by Richard Stoltzman when Peter Erős conducted its initial presentation here during the 1981-82 season. Franklin Cohen was the most recent soloist for its sixth outing at these concerts, when Jahja Ling led it during the 2007-08 season. Our current soloist, Sheryl Renk, the SDSO's principal clarinetist, is giving her second solo performance of the concerto with the orchestra, having previously played it during the 2005-06 season, under the direction of Nuvi Mehta.

Richard Strauss' tone poem, *Tod und Verklärung*, was conducted by Nino Marcelli with the pre-war San Diego Symphony Orchestra during the city's 1936 exhibition season. The concert was broadcast nationally by the Columbia Broadcasting System as one of a series from the exhibition. Peter Erős led the first performance of the work with the revived, post-war SDSO during the 1978-79 season, and it has been repeated here twice since then, the last time under the guest direction of Bernhard Klee during the 1988-89 season.

Heidi Krall sang the *Vier letzte Lieder* when they were first performed here, when John Barnett conducted the orchestra during the summer season of 1959. Jessica Jones sang when the orchestra played the songs in their most recent, fourth presentation at these concerts, under guest conductor Giancarlo Guerrero, during the 2002-03 season.