

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
A JACOBS MASTERWORKS CONCERT
Rafael Payare, conductor**

January 13 and 14, 2018

HECTOR BERLIOZ *Roman Carnival, Op. 9*

ROBERTO SIERRA *Con madera, metal y cuero (Percussion Concerto)*
Con ritmo y filo
Transparente y luminoso
Con energía y precisión rítmica
Steven Schick, percussion

INTERMISSION

SERGE PROKOFIEV *Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100*
Andante
Allegro moderato
Adagio
Allegro giocoso

Roman Carnival, Op. 9

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Born December 11, 1803, La Côte-St. André, Grenoble

Died March 8, 1869, Paris

Berlioz made a characteristic choice when he decided to write his first opera about Benvenuto Cellini, the sixteenth-century goldsmith, sculptor, adventurer – and author of a self-conscious autobiography. Berlioz, who would later write his own splendidly self-conscious autobiography, was strongly drawn to the figure of Cellini, but the opera was a complete failure at its premiere in Paris in September 1838. It had only four performances. French audiences sneered at it as “Malvenuto Cellini,” and Berlioz noted (with typical detachment) that after the overture “the rest was hissed with admirable energy and unanimity.” Liszt led a successful revival at Weimar in 1852, but *Benvenuto Cellini* has not held the stage.

Berlioz was stung by the failure of the opera, but he continued to love its music, and years later he would speak of its “variety of ideas, an impetuous verve, and a brilliancy of musical coloring.” In 1843, five years after the failed premiere, he pulled out two of its themes and from them fashioned an overture that he planned to use as an introduction to the second tableau of the opera, set in Rome’s Piazza Colonna during carnival season. Those two themes are: the aria “O Teresa, vous que j’aime plus que la vie,” which Benvenuto sings to his seventeen-year-old lover in the first tableau; and the saltarello from the second tableau, which the players from Cassandro’s theater dance to attract crowds during the pre-Lenten festivities. Berlioz may have intended that his new overture would serve as part of the opera, but when he led the overture as a concert piece in Paris on February 3, 1844, it was such a success that it had to be encored. It has since become one of his most popular works on its own, entirely divorced from the opera that gave it life.

The *Roman Carnival Overture*, as this music was eventually named, opens with a great flourish that hints at the saltarello theme to be heard later – Berlioz marks this flourish *Allegro assai* and further specifies that it should be *con fuoco* (“with fire”). The music quickly settles as the English horn sings Benvenuto’s plaintive love-song, and this is extended briefly before the music leaps ahead at the saltarello, originally a dance from the Mediterranean area in a lively 6/8 meter. This is a wonderful moment – the crispness of Berlioz’s rhythmic energy is nicely

underlined by his decision to keep the strings muted during the first part of the saltarello. Along its spirited way Berlioz brings back the love-song theme and turns it into a fugato, and there is some deft combination of the main ideas. Finally, though, it is the dance that triumphs, and Berlioz's ending explodes with all the sonic fireworks appropriate to a carnival in Rome.

***Con madera, metal y cuero* (Percussion Concerto)**

ROBERTO SIERRA

Born October 9, 1953, Vega Baja, Puerto Rico

In 1998 the great Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie, who has commissioned over 200 works for percussion, asked Robert Sierra to write a concerto for her. Originally from Puerto Rico, Sierra had his early training there, but then went on to study in Europe, some of that time spent as a student of György Ligeti in Hamburg. He eventually returned to the Americas, and over the last three decades he has been composer-in-residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony, Puerto Rico Symphony and New Mexico Symphony. During this time he has also had works commissioned and performed by almost all the leading American orchestras. It is a measure of his international success that one of his most popular pieces, *Fandangos*, was performed on the opening night of the 2002 Proms by the BBC Symphony. Sierra, who has composed prolifically in almost all genres, including 19 concertos for various instruments, currently teaches at Cornell University.

Sierra composed *Con madera, metal y cuero* in 1998, and the commission was jointly underwritten by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Corporación de las Artes Escénico-Musicales, the Festival Casals de Puerto Rico and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Evelyn Glennie was soloist when Esa-Pekka Salonen led the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the premiere on January 21, 1999. The composer has furnished a program note in the score, which is published by Subito Music:

When writing a concerto a composer quite often has in mind the soloist for whom the piece is written. Evelyn Glennie's incredible virtuosity and musicianship provided me with an opportunity for unbridled musical expression. The title *Con madera, metal y cuero* (With Wood, Metal and Skin) refers to the three timbres or materials from which percussion instruments are made. The work is in three movements that follow one another without interruption, dominated in turn by the contrasting timbres produced by

these materials.

The first section derives its form from the contrast between loud orchestral unisons and solo passages with orchestral accompaniment. The constant sixteenth-note pulse in the solo part is transformed by way of accents into a variety of uneven rhythmic patterns. The soloist begins with keyboards (marimba and xylophone) and gradually works toward indefinite pitched percussion, leading eventually to the second section where metallic sounds are exploited. This section is a chaconne for orchestra. Two strands of the same six note chord sequence move parallel at two different speeds creating shifts in harmonies and colors. The final section is mainly about drums. As in the first section, two basic elements alternate in shifting lengths to give form and shape to the music. These two elements are either alternations of sixteenth and eighth-note patterns reminiscent of Caribbean popular music, or continuous triple rhythms that metrically modulate into uneven eighth-note patterns. (— Roberto Sierra)

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100

SERGE PROKOFIEV

Born April 23, 1891, Sontsovka

Died March 5, 1953, Moscow

The premiere of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony on January 13, 1945, in Moscow, was one of those storybook tales, almost too good to be true. As Prokofiev mounted the podium, the sound of distant artillery rumbled through the hall. The news had just arrived that the Russian army had smashed across the Vistula River in Poland and was preparing for its final assault on Nazi Germany. After four horrific years of war, the end was in sight – that artillery barrage was the sound of the garrison in Moscow celebrating the now-inevitable victory. And so it was that Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony was heard for the first time with a prelude of artillery thunder. This music made an overwhelming impression on audiences, both that night in Moscow and around the world in the following months; it remains today one of the most frequently performed of twentieth-century symphonies.

Prokofiev composed this music in the space of one month during the summer of 1944 at the Composer's House in Ivanovo, an artists' retreat 150 miles northeast of Moscow.

Shostakovich was also there that summer, composing two works that many have felt were touched by the war, his Trio in E minor and his Second String Quartet. Prokofiev refused to

make a connection between the war and his new work, saying only that he “conceived it as a symphony of the grandeur of the human spirit.”

Like Stravinsky and Copland, Prokofiev was not by nature a symphonist. He found himself more comfortable with dance scores and smaller forms – his Third and Fourth Symphonies are based on material he drew from his ballets *The Fiery Angel* and *The Prodigal Son*. Now, however – in the face of a defining national moment – Prokofiev turned to the most serious of orchestral forms and wrote with vision and force. His Fifth Symphony builds across an effective sequence in its four movements: a broad-scaled and conflicted first movement gives way to a propulsive scherzo, which is in turn followed by a painful *Adagio*; the symphony concludes with an almost happy-go-lucky finale that takes themes from the first movement and transforms them to suit its mood of celebration. The symphony’s themes are simple, even singable, its orchestration masterful. Some of Prokofiev’s early scores had been brutal in their impact (the young composer had taken delight in outraging audiences), but now at age 53 he handles the orchestra with distinction. The scoring here ranges from the most delicate effects (the majority of its themes are introduced by solo woodwinds) to some of the loudest music ever written for orchestra. The combination of dramatic content, attractive themes, skillful orchestration and formal control makes this music almost unique among Prokofiev’s works, and one observer has gone so far as to describe Prokofiev’s Fifth as “Shostakovich’s finest symphony,” a remark that – however witty – is unfair to both composers.

The very beginning is deceptively innocent: Prokofiev’s Fifth Symphony opens with the pastel sound of two flutes and a bassoon playing the simple opening idea, and the other themes – all introduced quietly and lyrically – appear quickly. This movement is an *Andante* rather than the expected *Allegro*, but while the pace may be measured, it is also inexorable, and the music gathers force as it proceeds. In its closing moments, skies blacken over what had been a generally serene landscape, and the climax is shattering, one of the most impressive in all symphonic music: tunes that had seemed genial on their first appearance now explode as the strength pent up in those simple figures is unleashed.

The ticking accompaniment heard at the very beginning of the *Allegro marcato* continues throughout; this near-demonic *tick-tock-tick-tock* is so pervasive that the ear seems to hear it even when it is not there. Solo clarinet leads the way in this music, full of rhythmic energy and instrumental color. Much of this color comes from Prokofiev’s imaginative handling of

percussion, particularly snare drum, woodblock, piano and tambourine. The piercing sound of oboe and clarinet herald the arrival of the good-natured trio, but the return of the opening material brings a surprise: over the halting (almost suppressed) sound of staccato trumpets, timpani and pizzicato strings, the opening theme now sounds lugubrious. Gradually the tempo accelerates, and the *Scherzo* smashes its way to the close.

While Prokofiev would not make a specific connection between this symphony and the war that had raged across Russia for three years when it was written, it is hard not to feel that the *Adagio* is touched by the events of those years. This grieving music opens with a simple clarinet melody that quickly turns impassioned, and a range of melodic material follows, including a broad-spanned theme that rises up over a span of four octaves and a grotesque march that sounds like something straight out of a Mahler symphony. Much of the writing here, particularly for the strings, is very high, yet for all this movement's pain, its quiet closing moments are among the most beautiful in the symphony.

The concluding *Allegro giocoso* is well named, for this truly is fast and happy music. Prokofiev re-introduces several themes from the first movement here, but now he transforms them; ideas that had sounded poised in the first movement become rollicking in this finale. Violas lead the way into the main section, full of sweep and high spirits – it takes little imagination to hear the sound of laughter at moments in this music of celebration. The ending is particularly effective. With the music racing along, Prokofiev suddenly reduces his forces to just a handful of players, and for a few moments this mighty symphony becomes chamber music. In the last seconds, the entire orchestra leaps back in for the ear-splitting rush up the scale that drives Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony to its exultant close.

-Program notes by Eric Bromberger

PERFORMANCE HISTORY by Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, Symphony Archivist

Berlioz's brilliant overture, Roman Carnival, from his opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, was first played by the San Diego Symphony when Fabien Sevitzyk conducted it during the 1949 summer season, the first season of the newly-reorganized orchestra after World War II. Since that performance, it has been repeated at these concerts 15 times, most recently when Jahja Ling conducted it during the 2012-13 season. The great Fifth Symphony by Prokofiev was introduced to San Diego Symphony audiences during the 1978-79 season when Charles Ketcham conducted

the performance. Since then, it has been programmed here six times, most recently when Jahja Ling conducted it here and then just days later at the San Diego Symphony's October 2013 Carnegie Hall debut. The orchestra also performed this work during the China Friendship Tour that followed immediately on from that highly acclaimed New York debut. The percussion concerto by Roberto Sierra, *Con madera, metal y cuero*, is being given its San Diego Symphony premiere at these concerts.