

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
A JACOBS MASTERWORKS CONCERT
Sameer Patel, conductor**

February 10 and 11, 2018

FRANZ LISZT

Les Préludes

ADAM SCHOENBERG

Orchard in Fog (Violin Concerto – World Premiere)

Frail

Dancing

Farewell Song

Anne Akiko Meyers, violin

INTERMISSION

JEAN SIBELIUS

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 82

Tempo molto moderato; Allegro moderato

Andante mosso, quasi allegretto

Allegro molto

Les Préludes

FRANZ LISZT

Born October 22, 1811, Raiding, Hungary

Died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth

Les Préludes has always been the most popular of Liszt's 12 symphonic poems. The composer explained its title by printing in the score a lengthy paraphrase of the *Méditations poétiques* of the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869). Lamartine's poem is a rather flowery discourse on the tribulations of life, particularly on the difference between war and the pastoral life. The paraphrase in the score captures some of its flavor: "What else is life but a series of preludes to that unknown hymn, the first and solemn note of which is intoned by Death? Love is the dawn of all existence; but what fate is there whose first delights of happiness are not interrupted by some storm..." Liszt's music – which seems to depict these many "preludes to that unknown hymn" – was first performed in Weimar on February 23, 1854, and it remains a favorite with audiences.

But the problem with the story of the music's inspiration is that it isn't true. Liszt originally wrote this music in 1848 as the overture to a work for male chorus called *Les Quatre Éléments* (*The Four Elements*) on a text by Joseph Autran. When he saw that he was not going to finish that piece, Liszt extracted the overture, revised it and grafted Lamartine's poem onto it – Liszt had composed this music before he thought of the Lamartine poem or the title *Les Préludes*. That should not detract from our enjoyment of the music, but it should warn listeners not to search for connections between the music and the poem, and it also reminds us that Liszt's conception of the symphonic poem was rather general. At the end of the nineteenth century, Richard Strauss would aim for exact pictorial representation in his tone poems (Strauss bragged that he could set a glass of beer to music so specifically you could tell it was a pilsner), but Liszt had no such aim, and his music should be enjoyed on its own merits.

And those merits are considerable. *Les Préludes* is one of the finest examples of Liszt's theory of the "transformation of themes." Classical sonata form was based on the contrast between quite different thematic material, but Liszt aimed for a more organic conception in which an entire piece of music might grow out of a few seminal themes. These themes would then be transformed across the span of the work, taking on a different character at each reappearance. In *Les Préludes*, the principal theme is the deep three-note figure announced by

the strings at the very beginning. These three notes will prove an extremely fertile idea (so fertile, in fact, that Liszt's younger colleague César Franck would later use the same figure as the basis for his Symphony in D minor). Listeners can follow this fundamental theme-shape through Liszt's many ingenious transformations – *Les Préludes* is episodic, and these episodes vary from the lyric to the violently dramatic. Two subsequent ideas appear in the course of the music: a murmuring, relaxed figure for horns and violas, and a more spirited section introduced by solo horn. The latter is quite attractive – there is a glistening, fresh quality to this section (Liszt's marking is *Allegretto pastorale*), and it brings relief after some of the earlier drama. As the music proceeds, Liszt proves quite adept at combining his various themes, and at the end *Les Préludes* builds to a rousing (and very loud) climax.

Orchard in Fog

ADAM SCHOENBERG

Born November 15, 1980, Northampton, MA

[The composer has supplied a program note.]

Orchard in Fog takes its name from a photograph by Adam Laipson of an apple orchard in winter. This particular orchard happens to be in the same place where my wife and I were married in my hometown of New Salem, MA. Adam was generous enough to give us the photograph as a wedding gift, and it hangs in our bedroom. I've been waking up to this beautiful, haunting image every day for the past six years, and I am continually drawn to it. When Anne Akiko Meyers asked me to write her a violin concerto, a narrative inspired by this image and place immediately came to mind:

Orchard in Fog tells the story of an aging man visiting the orchard where he was once married many years ago. It is the dead of winter, and he is now weak and tired, and nearing the end of his life. The first movement (*Frail*) is reflective, and represents the present day. It features a series of melodies that are more melancholic than hopeful. The violin uses a scordatura tuning (in this instance, the G string is tuned down to F for the duration of the concerto), and focus is not only given to the low F, but also to the uppermost register of the E string (which is the highest string on the violin). The first movement is 11 minutes.

Movement II (*Dancing*) is a memory. It captures the old man looking back on his life and all of the beautiful, youthful moments he had with his wife. The movement is essentially one

long dance that is built on a layering technique, where something new happens nearly every eight measures. It also features the solo violin more as a member of the first violins than as a traditional soloist. This 5-minute movement ends with a coda that has all of the strings playing together in an unpredictable rhythm.

Movement III (*Farewell Song*) gradually brings us back to the present day, and to the orchard where the old man's journey first began. This is his farewell song to his love, and to the life that he has known. It is now time for him to leave everything behind and move into the unknown. It once again takes advantage of the now G string tuned down to F, as the entire movement is in the key of F. Whereas movement I was more somber in tone, this movement gives us a glimmer of hope and acceptance. – *Adam Schoenberg*

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 82

JEAN SIBELIUS

Born December 8, 1865, Tavastehus, Finland

Died September 20, 1957, Järvenpää, Finland

World War I threatened the western consciousness in a way that it had never been assaulted before: for the first time it dawned on the human imagination that it might be possible to destroy civilization. That war, which leveled so much of western Europe, left Scandinavia untouched, and the residents of those countries were left watching warily as the horror unfolded to the south. In 1915, the first full year of the war, two Scandinavian composers drafted powerful symphonies. Neither composer connected his symphony directly to the war, but it is hard not to feel that both works register some response to that traumatic time. In Denmark, Carl Nielsen wrote his Fourth Symphony, which he called the *Inextinguishable* – it is a violent symphony that finally makes a statement of faith that life will prevail. In Finland, Jean Sibelius wrote his Fifth Symphony, which – while not so violent as the Nielsen – also drives to a heroic conclusion. Sibelius wanted his symphony understood only as music: for the London premiere in 1921, he specified that “The composer desires the work to be regarded as absolute music, having no direct poetic basis.” But while neither symphony may consciously be about the war, both make statements of strength and hope from out of that turbulent time.

The Sibelius Fifth Symphony had a difficult birth – it went through three different versions spread out over five years. Sibelius had made a successful tour of America in 1914, and

he returned home to find Europe at war. A notebook entry from September 1914 brings his first mention of the new symphony, as well as an indication of how depressed he was: “In a deep valley again. But I already begin to see dimly the mountain that I shall certainly ascend...God opens his door for a moment and His orchestra plays the Fifth Symphony.” He drafted the symphony across 1915 and led the premiere on December 8 of that year, his fiftieth birthday. But Sibelius was dissatisfied, and across 1916 he revised the symphony, combining its first two movements and so reducing the number of movements from four to three. But when this version was performed in December 1916, he was still unhappy, and he came back to the symphony three years later and revised it a third time. This final version was premiered in Helsinki on November 24, 1919, a year after the end of the war.

As completed, the Fifth Symphony has an unusual structure, and it blurs traditional notions of sonata form, which depends on the contrast and resolution of different material. Instead, the Fifth Symphony evolves through the organic growth of a few fundamental ideas. The most important of these is the horn call heard at the opening of the first movement. That shape sweeps up over an octave and falls back (commentators are unable to resist comparing this opening to the dawn), and this shape will recur in many forms over the course of the symphony. The movement rises to a great climax at which that horn-shape blazes out in the brass, then speeds seamlessly into the *Allegro moderato*. This is the symphony’s scherzo, and in the earliest version of the Fifth Symphony it was a separate movement. (This movement also incorporates the fanfare-figure from the opening, and perhaps that unifying feature was what led Sibelius to fuse the two movements). The movement gathers strength on its relentless 3/4 pulse and drives to a tremendous conclusion.

The central movement – *Andante mosso, quasi allegretto* – is variation form, but even this old form evolves under Sibelius’ hands. Instead of a clear theme followed by variations, Sibelius instead offers a series of variations on a rhythm: a sequence of five-note patterns first stamped out by low pizzicato strings. Such a plan runs the danger of growing repetitious, but Sibelius colors each repetition in a new way and at one point plunges into a rather unsettled interlude in E-flat Major before returning to the home key of G Major and a quiet close. In the movement’s final minutes come hints once again of the horn-theme from the symphony’s very beginning.

The concluding *Allegro molto* bursts to life in a great rush of energy from rustling strings,

and soon this busy sound is penetrated by the sound of horns, which punch out a series of ringing attacks. In a memorable phrase, the English writer Donald Francis Tovey has described this moment as Thor swinging his hammer through the whistling wind, but it is a mark of the subtle unity of this symphony that this same figure had served as an accompaniment figure to the rhythmic variations of the middle movement. Over the cascading peal of those bright horn attacks, woodwinds sing a radiant melody, one so broad and grand that its effect has been compared to the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth. This melody evolves through various forms and finally builds to a great climax and drives toward the powerful close.

Nielsen had concluded his *Inextinguishable* Symphony with a ferocious duel between two timpanists stationed at each side of the stage. By contrast, the end of Sibelius' Fifth Symphony feels classic in its simplicity. Sibelius builds to a climax, cuts the music off in silence, and then finishes with six huge chords. The first four – widely and unevenly spaced – feel lonely and uncertain, and then every player on the stage joins together for the final two chords, bringing the Fifth Symphony to its smashing close.

Scandinavian composers were all too aware during World War I of the chaos sweeping across Europe, and both Nielsen and Sibelius responded with wartime symphonies that held out hope in the face of that destruction. If Sibelius refused to connect his Fifth Symphony directly to that war, he nevertheless made its moral message clear in his own description of its ending: "The whole, if I may say so, a vital climax to the end. Triumphal."

-Program notes by Eric Bromberger

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

Les Préludes, Liszt's most famous tone poem, was first played in San Diego by the original San Diego Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of their first music director, Buren Schryock, in 1914. Nino Marcelli conducted the San Diego Symphony in *Les Préludes* during the San Diego Summer Exposition Season of 1936. That concert was broadcast coast to coast by the Columbia Broadcasting System. Nicolai Sokoloff conducted it during the final 1941 summer concert in Balboa Park before the park was closed during the war. The short-lived San Diego Philharmonic, under Leslie Hodge, played it in 1952, and Morton Gould, as guest conductor in the summer of 1981, returned it to the San Diego Symphony's repertory. Since then, Murry Sidlin, Jahja Ling and, most recently – in the 2010-11 season – Thomas Wilkins, led it with the

orchestra.

Charles Grove guest-conducted the San Diego Symphony during the season of 1980-81, when he introduced this audience to the glorious Sibelius Fifth Symphony. Its most recent, fourth outing here was under the direction of John Loughran in the 1992-93 season. These current concerts mark the world premiere presentation of the new violin concerto, *Orchard in Fog*, by Adam Schoenberg. (The orchestra first performed a work by this young composer, *Finding Rothko*, during the 2015-16 season, led by guest conductor Johannes Debus in his SDSO debut.)