SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2
A Jacobs Masterworks Concert
Robert Spano, conductor

March 9 and 10, 2019

CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS Dreamtime Ancestors
Songlines
Rainbow Serpent
Each Stone Speaks a Poem

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 19
Allegro con brio
Adagio
Rondo: Molto allegro
Jorge Federico Osorio, piano

INTERMISSION

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Symphony No. 2 in G Major: A London Symphony
Lento – Allegro risoluto
Lento
Scherzo (Nocturne)
Andante con moto – Maestoso alla marcia
FROM AUSTRALIA TO LONDON, BY WAY OF VIENNA

Geographically, this concert offers a spectacular journey. It begins in the wilds of Western Australia, where Christopher Theofanidis discovered the creation myths of the aboriginal peoples who had lived there for tens of thousands of years. From them he created a piece of music in which all time collapses upon itself – for those peoples, time is all one, and all time is always present. The concert concludes on the other side of the planet, where Ralph Vaughan Williams offers a musical portrait of the city of London, a portrait that is circumscribed precisely within the span of 24 hours. Along the way, we make a stop in Vienna, perhaps to refuel but more to be reminded, through an early Beethoven concerto, of the splendor of High Classical style as it had taken shape in that city at the end of the eighteenth century.

Dreamtime Ancestors
CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS
Born December 18, 1967, Dallas

Christopher Theofanidis spent time early in 2015 in Western Australia, where he was gathering material for his Creation/Creators, an oratorio about different creation myths and human creativity. There he came into contact with ancient Australian aboriginal culture and its distinctive creation myths. One of these was the aboriginal belief in “dreamtime ancestors” – the concept that time is all one and that all humans are connected to their ancestors and to their descendants and can communicate with them. When Theofanidis was asked for a new work by a consortium of American orchestras sponsored by New Music for America, he turned to that myth and used it as the inspiration for Dreamtime Ancestors. Composed during the summer of 2015, Dreamtime Ancestors was premiered on October 3, 2015, by the Plymouth Philharmonic Orchestra. The piece has proven quite successful: since the debut it has been performed by more than 50 orchestras. Theofanidis dedicated Dreamtime Ancestors to the memory of composer Stephen Paulus, who died in the fall of 2014.

Dreamtime Ancestors, which spans about 20 minutes, is in three movements. The first is titled Songlines. Theofanidis has explained that “songlines” are what indigenous people call the physical surroundings left behind by ancient ancestors – rivers, mountains and so on – and that these songlines sing to call souls back to their ancestral home. This movement bursts to life with
a great fanfare, then introduces thematic material that will reappear throughout the piece. *Rainbow Serpent* takes its name from the deity that appears in all the Australian aboriginal myths. Theofanidis calls the rainbow serpent the “ultimate topography sculptor,” primarily of features in the heavens like rainbows and stars. The title of the final movement, *Each Stone Speaks a Poem*, refers to one of the underlying beliefs of aboriginal mythology – that even the most common objects partake of the divinity that created them. This is an animated movement, full of the sound of percussion instruments – the composer notes that it is built on “drier sounds that eventually open up to some kind of poetry and music.”

Christopher Theofanidis studied at Yale, the Eastman School of Music and the University of Houston. He has taught at the Peabody Conservatory and the Juilliard School, and he is currently a professor of composition at Yale. He has been composer-in-residence with the Pittsburgh Symphony and now holds that same position with the Aspen Music Festival. Theofanidis is a most prolific composer – of operas, oratorios, orchestral pieces, concertos, chamber music and vocal works – and his music has been performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, London Symphony, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and many other ensembles and soloists.

**Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 19**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

Beethoven’s Second Piano Concerto contains some of his earliest music to make it into the standard repertory. There is evidence that he began work on this concerto as early as 1785, when he was a teenager in Bonn; he revised it thoroughly in his first years in Vienna, and then – after its premiere at a charity concert in 1795 – he wrote an entirely new finale in 1798. During these same years, he wrote another piano concerto, in C Major, which was published in March 1801. When the Concerto in B-flat was published later that year, it was inevitably listed as No. 2, though it had been the first to be written.

The Second Piano Concerto has always been the least familiar of Beethoven’s five piano concertos, at least in part because of a remark made by the composer himself – he once referred to it as “A concerto for piano, which I do not consider one of my best,” and some have been
quick to take this cue. Beethoven, always a good salesman for his own music, made that remark as a way of noting how much better his subsequent concertos were, and in fact the evidence is strong that Beethoven held the Second Piano Concerto in high regard: he performed it frequently (at least twice with Haydn conducting) and much later in life he came back and wrote a new cadenza for the first movement, clear evidence of his continuing affection for this music.

Beethoven’s admiration for the piano concertos of Mozart is well-known, and it is not surprising that a young composer should adopt those concertos as his model. The scoring for the Second Concerto is Mozartean (one flute, pairs of oboes, horns, bassoons and strings), and the structure is similar to the pattern of the older composer’s concertos. At the same time, young Beethoven was very interested in establishing his fame as a virtuoso pianist, and the spotlight remains very firmly on the soloist throughout this concerto.

The opening Allegro con brio is a great deal less violent than some of the other movements to which Beethoven would later give that same marking, such as the opening movements of the Third and Fifth Symphonies. A substantial orchestral introduction (90 measures) leads to the entrance of the pianist and the development of the sprightly, dotted opening figure and a more lyric second theme introduced by the strings. The cadenza, which may have been written as late as 1809, offers a fugato on the concerto’s opening theme that takes the soloist to the extremes of the keyboard; the coda is only six measures long.

In the lyric Adagio, the musical interest remains almost exclusively in the piano – after its brief introduction, the orchestra simply provides discreet accompaniment for the piano. The high-spirited finale, a rondo, is full of energy and syncopated accents. Beethoven nicely unifies this movement by keeping the contrasting episodes very much in the manner of the rondo tune itself, and this sparkling music dances home with a gracefulness that has marked the entire concerto.
Vaughan Williams’ nine symphonies, composed over a span of nearly 50 years, form one of the finest cycles of the twentieth century, and so it comes as a surprise to learn that he never intended to write symphonies at all. He had set out to write a different kind of music, one based on English folk idioms and far removed from the overpowering achievement of German music in this most monumental of forms. His first symphony was written almost by accident: *A Sea Symphony*, not completed until its composer was 37, is a setting for chorus and orchestra of four poems by Walt Whitman about the sea, and only when it was finished did Vaughan Williams recognize that it conformed to symphonic form and allow it to be called a symphony.

The genesis of his Second Symphony was more deliberate. The composer George Butterworth had visited Vaughan Williams, who later recalled their conversation: “At the end of the evening, just as he was getting up to go, he said, in his characteristically abrupt way, ‘You know, you ought to write a symphony.’ From that moment the idea of a symphony – a thing which I had always declared I would never attempt – dominated my mind.” Vaughan Williams’ Symphony No. 2, composed in 1912-13, falls into standard forms: a sonata-form first movement, a lyric second, a scherzo, and a dramatic finale. The composer later dedicated it to the memory of Butterworth, who was killed in World War I.

Yet this second essay in symphonic form also defies convention, because the symphony has a nickname – the composer himself called it *A London Symphony* – and because it seems to have a program. Does this symphony paint a musical portrait of London, and so is it more program music than symphony? Here matters grow murky. The conductor Albert Coates later supplied a lengthy account of what was “happening” at every point in this music, describing in detail the street cries, the grim appearance of London’s unemployed, and each individual turn down a specific alley – Coates in effect transformed this music into one vast musical canvas. The composer himself was more evasive:

It has been suggested that this symphony has been misnamed, it should rather be called “Symphony by a Londoner,” that is to say it is in no sense descriptive, and though the introduction of the “Westminster Chimes” in the first movement, the slight reminiscence
of the “Lavendar Cry” in the slow movement, and the very faint suggestion of mouth organs and mechanical pianos in the Scherzo give it a tinge of “local colour,” yet it is intended to be listened to as “absolute music.” Hearers may, if they like, localize the various themes and movements but it is hoped this is not a necessary part of the music. And so the matter remains unresolved, and perhaps just as well. It is a symphony, and at the same time it is a musical evocation of the sights and sounds – and character – of London.

*A London Symphony* is framed by a prologue and an epilogue. The slow and misty beginning – Vaughan Williams admitted that the opening pattern of three rising notes from the low strings had been “unconsciously cribbed” from Debussy’s *La Mer* – has struck all observers as a portrait of the Thames flowing past, and through the mists we hear a bit of the Westminster Chimes striking the half-hour. The music gathers force and drives directly into the *Allegro risoluto*, a surprisingly violent beginning to the exposition, which Vaughan Williams said “may [note the verb] suggest the noise and hurry of London.” The movement is built on a wealth of ideas, ranging from tiny bits of theme to a great, ringing four-note fanfare from the brass and onto folk-like tunes from the woodwinds. These are developed at length, sometimes with impressive contrapuntal assurance, and the lengthy movement comes to a triumphant close on the fanfare figure.

Muted strings introduce the slow movement, which the composer said might be called “Bloomsbury Square on a November afternoon”; Butterworth called this movement “an idyll of grey skies and secluded byways.” English horn sounds the arching, plaintive main idea, which is taken up and extended by the strings. The middle section of this ternary-form movement is introduced by the solo viola, with darting responses from the solo clarinet, and these lead to a variant of the cry of a street vendor advertising lavender. This “idyll of grey skies,” which offers several heartfelt eruptions along the way, concludes with a brief return of the opening section and a final reminiscence of the solo viola tune.

Vaughan Williams specifies that the third movement is both a scherzo *and* a nocturne, so this is a portrait of London at night. Strings come dancing out of the whirring opening trills, and two clarinets announces the main idea, which races nimbly along the 6/8 meter (the marking is *Allegro vivace*). The scherzo is interrupted by two trios: the first stamps along vigorously on a variant of the main theme, while the second begins with what sound like wheezing harmonica chords, which introduce street-tunes in the woodwinds. The return of the scherzo, which includes
a resounding processional for brass, leads to a surprisingly muted and dark close.

Out of the silence, the last movement bursts to life in a great discordant cry. The main body of this movement is a march, which frames an Allegro section; the march returns to round out the main part of the movement, and then the symphony comes to an impressive close. Vaughan Williams recalls bits of material from the first movement, and suddenly we are back in the mists of the very beginning, with the Thames flowing quietly past. Big Ben rings distantly, this time to mark three-quarters of an hour, and the Epilogue carries us to the close as through the mists we hear more memories of earlier movements. Gradually a sense of time breaks down, and the symphony – and London itself – fade into inaudibility.

-Program notes by Eric Bromberger

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

This concert marks the first San Diego hearing of any music by Christopher Theofanidis. Malcolm Frager was the soloist when the San Diego Symphony first programmed the Beethoven Second Piano Concerto under Earl Bernard Murray during the 1964-65 season. Eight outings have followed, most recently during the 2009-10 season when Orli Shaham was the soloist and Jahja Ling conducted.

David Atherton led the only previous San Diego Symphony performance of the Vaughan Williams masterpiece, A London Symphony, during the 1983-84 season. The composer's first few symphonies were numbered, quite appropriately, but this one, his second, was practically never known by its number. It was always “A London Symphony.”

I have a personal recollection centered around the name of the Vaughan Williams piece, involving a famed conductor who knew the composer well. In the 1960s and 70s, as a member of the San Diego Symphony Executive Committee. I enjoyed a number of the Association's social affairs. One particular party was given in honor of a guest orchestra whose local appearance was sponsored by the Symphony. It was one of the five major London orchestras but I have forgotten which one. The conductor touring with them was a famous British maestro, Sir Malcolm Sargent, with whom I spent considerable time that evening. The party was given at a large estate on Point Loma, and I showed him around. He was, like all Englishmen, especially interested in the garden, and as we walked around we conversed a great deal about music as well as the plants. I asked
him if he had ever led “The London Symphony.” He stopped walking, turned around toward me and, as I cringed, proceeded to lecture me. Beginning, he told me in no uncertain terms that he had, indeed, conducted the work on a number of occasions, and that he knew both the work and the composer very well. Moreover, he continued, he told me that I must never refer to the work as “The London Symphony.” That was using the wrong article! Vaughan Williams titled the piece “A London Symphony” deliberately and after considerable thought. In response to his asking, I told him that I had never yet been to London, and he replied that it was no wonder that I made the mistake regarding the name of the work.

Sir Malcolm then told me that the composer had thought for years about writing the work, in which he would incorporate the enormous, manifold numbers of stimuli and activities that the city of London provided to all who lived or visited there. Not only the great monuments, he made sure to point out odors as well – some being quite noxious – as well as the city noises, all of which the composer wanted to incorporate into the piece. The possible list of stimuli was seemingly endless. Because Vaughan Williams could not conceivably incorporate everything about and emanating from the great city, he felt that he could not legitimately title it The London Symphony. He selected whatever stimuli he felt could be made into music (and even more, which he cut later), but because these were only partial, this would be reflected in the name of the piece.

When critics and musicians asked about the possibility of his writing a sequel, the composer would shake his head and pointed out that he had done quite enough, fractional though it was. The conductor continued, noting that there was – and is (adding, “As you will find out when you go!”) – sufficient further inspiration in the city from which Vaughan Williams could have easily selected enough for “A Second London Symphony.”

I thanked Sir Malcolm, trying not to be too effusive, but he was back in very good humor. He shook my hand and made me promise to remember what he had told me, “Never make the titling mistake again, and enjoy all of London when you go.” I have followed his instructions to the fullest.