

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**  
**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM**  
**A Jacobs Masterworks Concert**  
**Rafael Payare, conductor**

October 11 and 12, 2019

**ANTONIO ESTÉVEZ**     *Mediodia en el llano (Midday on the Plains)*

**ROBERT SCHUMANN**     **Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54**  
Allegro affettuoso  
Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso  
Allegro vivace  
**Vikingur Ólafsson, piano**

INTERMISSION

**FELIX MENDELSSOHN**     **Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61**  
Overture  
Scherzo (after Act I)  
Act II, Sc. 1:  
    "Over hill, over dale;" Entrance of Oberon and Titania  
Act II, Sc. 2: "You spotted snakes, with double tongue"  
Act II, Sc. 2:  
    "What thou seest, when thou dost wake"  
Intermezzo, after Act II  
Act III, Sc. 1:  
    "What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here"  
Nocturne (end of Act III)  
Act IV, Sc. 1: "But first I will release the Fairy Queen"  
Wedding March (after Act IV)  
Act V, Sc. 1: Dialogue and Funeral March  
Dance of the Clowns  
Reprise of Wedding March (Exit of Lovers)  
Finale, Dialogue, and Song:  
    "Through this house give glimmering light"  
**Tasha Koontz, soprano**  
**Kira Dills-DeSurra, mezzo soprano**  
**Women of the San Diego Master Chorale**

### ***Mediodía en el llano (Midday on the Plains)***

ANTONIO ESTÉVEZ

Born January 3, 1916, Calabozo, Venezuela

Died November 26, 1988, Caracas

Antonio Estévez learned to play the saxophone as a boy but soon switched to oboe. At age 18 he entered the Escuela de Musica y Declamación in Caracas, where he studied composition with Vicente Emilio Sojo. In the meantime, however, the young man became so proficient an oboist that he played that instrument in the Caracas Symphony Orchestra for some years. Estévez became good friends with Aaron Copland, who invited him to study with Copland at Tanglewood during the summer of 1946. Estévez's most famous composition is his *Cantata Criolla* (1954), a massive work for vocal soloists, chorus and orchestra that tells of a singing contest between Florentino, a Venezuelan plainsman, and the Devil. At about age 50, Estévez became interested in electronic music and moved to Paris for further study. Among his later compositions were such electronic works as *Cosmovibraphonia* and *Cromofonia*, which were sometimes used to accompany art exhibits.

*Mediodía en el llano* is the work of a very young composer – Estévez was only 26 when his teacher Sojo commissioned an orchestral composition from him in 1942. Estévez responded with the *Suite Llanera* (Suite of the Plains), a three-movement piece that depicted the Venezuelan plains at morning, noon and evening. The composer made his conducting debut when he led the premiere later that year, but he was dissatisfied with the outer movements and discarded them. The middle movement, *Mediodía en el Llano*, now stands alone as an independent work.

*Mediodía en el Llano* is a brief tone poem that sets out to capture the stillness and the expanse of the Venezuelan plains at mid-day. This is a very subtle score – even as a young man Estévez was an accomplished orchestrator. *Mediodía* is for the most part quite subdued: the pace is slow, the mood calm, the dynamic very quiet. Yet within that quiet, Estévez writes with great imagination for the wind instruments, whose parts give character to the vast wilderness the music depicts. At about the mid-point, *Mediodía* sudden flares up: the tempo increases slightly, the entire orchestra suddenly awakens, and matters drive to a spirited climax. And just as suddenly the mood of calm returns, we are surrounded by stillness, and the music seems to vanish into the distance.

## **Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54**

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Born June 8, 1810, Zwickau

Died July 29, 1856, Endenich

In September 1840 Robert Schumann married the young Clara Wieck, one of the finest pianists in the world, and in that happy first year of marriage he wrote over 130 songs. But Clara was anxious that he try something more ambitious. In her journal she wrote, “My greatest wish is for him to compose for orchestra – that’s his field. May I succeed in leading him to it.” In the spring of 1841, she got her wish: Schumann composed his *Spring* Symphony and sketched a further symphony, but he also pressed on with another project, this time with his wife specifically in mind. He composed what he called a *Concert Fantasy* for piano and orchestra, and Clara (eight months pregnant) tried it out at a private rehearsal with the Leipzig orchestra that summer. But Schumann could find no publisher interested in a one-movement piece for piano and orchestra, and so the music stayed on the shelf for four years. Then in the summer of 1845 Schumann returned to it, wrote a finale, and composed the middle movement last. What had begun as an individual movement had become a piano concerto.

Clara was delighted: “Robert has... done a fine last movement... I am very glad, because I have never had a large-sized bravura piece from him.” She played the premiere in Dresden on December 4, 1845, with Ferdinand Hiller conducting, and repeated it in Leipzig on New Year’s Day 1846 with Mendelssohn on the podium. It was soon played throughout Europe, and it remains one of the most popular piano concertos ever written.

Yet it has a unique form. This is not a virtuoso concerto, a style that was becoming popular by the middle of the nineteenth century. Schumann said: “I cannot write a concerto for virtuoso; I shall have to contrive something else.” But neither does he return to the classical model of Mozart and Beethoven, with its symphonic argument advanced mutually by soloist and orchestra. This is a much smaller-scaled conception, more intimate in character, with the piano right at the center. Recognizing that his concerto did not conform to any existing model, Schumann called it “something between symphony, concerto and grand sonata.” Yet it would be a mistake to underestimate the ingenuity of this concerto. Despite a period of composition that stretched over four years, this music is beautifully unified around one main theme, which appears in all three movements, imaginatively varied on each appearance.

Schumann gives each movement an Italian tempo marking, but modifies each of these with an important qualification meant to suggest the music’s character. The opening movement

is the expected *Allegro*, but Schumann specifies that it should be *affettuoso*: “affectionate.” He instantly reverses classical form by having the piano introduce the orchestra: its cascading chords lead to the woodwinds’ statement of what will be the concerto’s central theme, here marked *espressivo*. The piano plays virtually throughout this concerto: the orchestra’s role is to accompany and sometimes to repeat or expand the soloist’s melodies. Characteristically, Schumann writes out a cadenza himself rather than allowing soloists the opportunity to write their own – he was afraid that too brilliant a cadenza would violate the gentle spirit of this music. The coda, a brisk march derived from the main theme, propels the movement to its firm close.

Schumann calls the middle movement an *Intermezzo* and marks it *Andantino grazioso*. Graceful it certainly is, with soloist and orchestra offering a delicate question-and-answer opening section and cellos soaring in the middle. The concerto’s main theme reappears in the transition to the finale as a tantalizing foretaste of what is to come, and this bursts to life at the *Allegro vivace*, where the piano thunders out the theme-shape in its most powerful manifestation. The finale is in sonata form, and Schumann treats the main theme to some vigorous counterpoint (and some wonderful rhythmic displacements) along the way before rushing to the close of this unique concerto, music that is fired in every measure by its creator’s love for his wife.

### **Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Op. 61**

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Born February 3, 1809, Hamburg

Died November 4, 1847, Leipzig

Felix Mendelssohn grew up in the most cultivated household in Berlin, and it is a measure of the Mendelssohn family’s sophistication that one of their recreations was reading Shakespeare’s plays together in the recent Schlegel-Tieck translation into German. Each member of the family would take different parts as they read, and Fanny Mendelssohn later remembered the impact of one play in particular:

We were saying yesterday what an important part the *Midsummer Night’s Dream* has always played in our home, and how we had all at different times gone through all the parts from Peaseblossom to Hermia and Helena... We were really brought up on the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Felix especially made it his own...

Felix indeed “made it his own” during the summer of 1826, when the 17-year-old composer retreated to a garden house on the family estate and composed an overture to that play that remains today the finest music ever inspired by Shakespeare. Young Mendelssohn captured the

spirit of Shakespeare's play so perfectly that the instant this music begins we feel ourselves transported to the woods outside Athens where Puck flits mischievously through the forest, the "rude mechanicals" rehearse their play, and lovers are mysteriously transformed.

The overture was widely performed as a separate work, and then in 1843 King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia asked Mendelssohn to write incidental music for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be given in Potsdam that fall. Now 34 years old, Mendelssohn reached back across the span of seventeen years to recapture the magic he had created as a teenager. Beginning with his overture, he wrote a series of movements to accompany the play – some of these are interludes and entr'actes, some are melodramas that accompany spoken text from the play with music, some are sung. It is a sophisticated conception of incidental music, as Mendelssohn interweaves music and sung or spoken text into the progress of the play on stage. The first production of the play with this music – which took place in the Neues Palais at Potsdam on October 14, 1843 – was an instant success, and today many regard the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Mendelssohn's finest achievement. The overture and symphonic movements have become familiar from concert performances, but this program offers the rare opportunity to experience *A Midsummer Night's Dream* much as Friedrich Wilhelm and the Potsdam court did in 1843: these concerts offer an abridged version of Shakespeare's play with the complete incidental music that Mendelssohn composed for it.

The beginning of the *Overture* is magic. Four soft chords in E Major – played only by the woodwinds – lift us into the land of make-believe, and suddenly Mendelssohn shifts to E minor, where the violins' glistening rush suggests the gossamer flickering of tiny wings. Violins sing the overture's powerful main theme (back in E Major), clarinets and violins have the flowing second subject, and all seems set when Mendelssohn surprises us a third theme-group: over heavy stamping, the orchestra shouts out a vigorous tune that ends with a great hee-haw. This is the braying of Bottom, the rustic actor who is transformed into an ass, and Mendelssohn makes it sound all the more strident by having that bray screech downward across the span of a ninth.

This description of themes may help introduce the overture, but it does not begin to suggest the lightness of Mendelssohn's touch in this music, its non-stop energy or its freshness. The overture's structure is crystal-clear – Mendelssohn uses the opening sequence of four chords to mark the beginning of the development and also of the recapitulation. One nice little surprise: as the music rushes toward its conclusion, Mendelssohn gives us a cascade of shining E Major

chords that will clearly bring the overture to a close. But they do not. This is a false ending, and the music instead rushes back into the flickering “fairyland” rush of the very beginning. This leads to the real ending: violins sing a relaxed version of the main theme, and the overture vanishes on the same four chords with which it began.

The famous *Scherzo* is an interlude between the first two acts of the play, while in the *Melodrama* Puck asks “whither wander you?” and the fairy replies:

Over hill, over dale,  
Thorough bush, thorough brier,  
Over park, over pale,  
Thorough flood, thorough fire

This quicksilver music captures perfectly the flitting of that fairy, as chattering woodwinds and strings mark his speedy trip. The bustling *March of the Fairies* is the music that accompanies the entrance of Oberon and Titania and their respective retinues.

The *Song with Chorus: “You spotted snakes”* comes from Act II, Scene II. Titania calls for a song to lull her to sleep, and the fairies sing this graceful spell to protect her from snakes, spiders and other threats.

The *Intermezzo* comes from the end of Act II, when Hermia has become lost in the woods and cries out in terror for rescue by her lover Lysander. Mendelssohn marks this music *Allegro appassionato*, and the agitated melodic line jumps uneasily between winds and strings as Hermia wanders through the woods. The conclusion of this movement brings an entirely different kind of music: the “rude mechanicals” enter the woods to begin rehearsals for their play, and Mendelssohn gives them amiably rustic music, here introduced by a pair of bassoons.

The next *Melodrama* and *Nocturne* come from the end of Act III. Puck comes upon the rustics in the woods (“What hempen homespuns have we swaggering here”) and squeezes a love potion in the eyes of the sleeping Lysander that will cause him to love the first thing he sees; here Puck offers the famous prediction: “Jack shall have his Jill.” The noble *Nocturne* features one of the great solos for French horn.

In the fifth act of the play, all of the various lovers – whose separations and confusions have been so troubling (and so much fun) – are finally married, and to introduce this act Mendelssohn wrote a *Wedding March* in C Major, full of ringing trumpet fanfares and bright energy. It is the best measure of the success of Mendelssohn’s music for *A Midsummer Night’s*

*Dream* that today – nearly two centuries after he wrote this music – this march is the first thing we think of when someone mentions wedding music. The grotesque *Funeral March*, scored for clarinet, bassoon and timpani, accompanies Thisbe's farewell. (This haunting little piece has seemed to many to prefigure Mahler.)

The final movements take us to the very end of the play. Bottom asks Theseus if he would rather have an epilogue or a dance. Theseus asks for the latter, and *Dance of the Clowns*, which incorporates the braying of the donkey from the *Overture*, is the dance of the actors before the king. The *Finale* is just that – a setting of the final speeches of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Oberon and Titania call for a blessing on all, and Puck bids the audience a final farewell. Mendelssohn draws much of the music for the *Finale* from the *Overture*, nicely rounding off his incidental music by taking it back to its magical beginning.

**-Program notes by Eric Bromberger**

### **Program History**

**By Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, San Diego Symphony Archivist**

The music of Antonio Estévez is being played here by the San Diego Symphony for the first time.

The first time that this Orchestra played the ultra-romantic piano concerto that Robert Schumann wrote for his beloved wife was in 1951, when Menahem Pressler was the soloist and Fabien Sevitzky conducted. (That conductor's name will be seen frequently in these columns because he had been hired as the first music director for several years following the 1950 reorganization of the San Diego Symphony after the end of World War II. Balboa Park, where its then summers-only concerts were given, had re-opened after being closed for all of WWII and a few years beyond.) Most recently, the Schumann concerto was played during the 2011-12 season, when Andrew von Oeyen was the soloist and Jahja Ling conducted its twelfth presentation at these concerts.

On many occasions through the years, the San Diego Symphony played several excerpts from the incidental music for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by Schumann's close friend, Felix Mendelssohn. Mostly the *Noctourne* and *Scherzo* were played and, of course, the *Wedding March*. My earliest source for the Orchestra's playing these excerpts was in 1936, at the great Balboa Park Exhibition, when Nino Marcelli conducted. A greater selection of the

incidental music from the complete Mendelssohn score was first played here in 1954, when Robert Shaw prepared and conducted a more complete compilation. That performance utilized vocal soloists, a large chorus and, as well, a separate children's chorus of fairies. In 1961 Earl Bernard Murray prepared a number of excerpts, including the Overture, and utilized as narrator the distinguished actor, Victor Buono, with chorus as well as the San Diego Ballet. The current presentation is the first of the nearly complete Mendelssohn score since those earlier versions.