

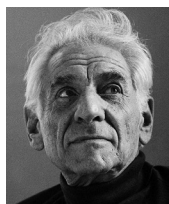
notes

February 16/17

NELSON CONDUCTS BERNSTEIN

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda

30 SECOND NOTES: The Des Moines Symphony's Bernstein Centennial Tribute continues with his *Divertimento*, composed in 1980 for the 100th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with whom he had a life-long association. Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition-winner Roman Rabinovich is soloist in Serge Prokofiev's *Concerto No. 3*, written for his 1921 American tour and premiered in Chicago with him as the soloist. Robert Schumann composed his *Symphony No. 2* at a time of great physical and emotional distress, and its determined, expressive arc may well reflect his return to health. 🎵



LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Born August 25, 1918 in Lawrence, Massachusetts; died October 14, 1990 in New York City.

DIVERTIMENTO FOR ORCHESTRA (1980)

- First performed on September 25, 1980 in Boston, conducted by Seiji Ozawa.
- These concerts mark the first performances of this piece by the Des Moines Symphony.

(Duration: ca. 14 minutes)

Though Leonard Bernstein became inextricably linked to the musical life of New York City, he always retained a profound affection for his native Boston. He was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, thirty miles north of the central city; the orchestra he first heard live was the Boston Pops; he graduated from Harvard; he made his debut as an orchestral conductor in

Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* in 1940 during the first of many residencies at Tanglewood, bucolic summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra; BSO Music Director Sergei Koussevitzky became his revered teacher and mentor (Bernstein was married in Koussevitzky's white suit, always wore his cufflinks when he conducted, and inherited his regal velvet cape, which he treasured until the end of his days); he taught young conductors for many years at Tanglewood and made his last public appearance there on August 19, 1990, just two months before his death.

So when the Boston Symphony Orchestra invited Bernstein to write a short piece to inaugurate its centennial season in 1980, he immediately agreed. He created a theme from the notes "B" and "C" (to signify "Boston Centennial") for his *Sennets and Tuckets* (a Shakespearean stage instruction for fanfares), but more transformations of the two-note motive occurred to him, so he expanded them into the eight-movement *Divertimento*, which was

premiered on September 25, 1980 under the direction of Seiji Ozawa at the first concert of the BSO's 100th Anniversary Season. Following the opening fanfare, *Divertimento* is largely fashioned from popular idioms as a tribute to the Boston Pops. The movements (*Waltz* for strings; *Mazurka* for double reeds; *Samba*; *Turkey Trot*; *Sphinxes*; *Blues* for brass and percussion; and the concluding march, *The BSO Forever*), which frequently allude to well-known passages in the orchestral literature (the finale is, of course, an homage to John Philip Sousa's rousing chef d'oeuvre), feature the various choirs of the ensemble.

The score calls for two piccolos, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, euphonium, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, triangle, woodblock, tambourine, tam-tam, bells, xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, chimes, temple blocks, maracas, cowbells, rasp, congas, bongos, sand blocks, drum set, harp, piano and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.



SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born April 23, 1891 in
Sontzovka, Russia;
died March 5, 1953 in
Moscow.

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 3 IN C MAJOR, OP. 26 (1921)

• First performed on December 16, 1921 in Chicago, conducted by Frederick Stock with the composer as soloist.

• First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on February 5, 1972 with Thomas Griswold conducting and James Birk as soloist. Three subsequent performances occurred, most recently on September 13 & 14, 2013 with Joseph Giunta conducting and Ilya Yakushev as soloist.

(Duration: ca. 27 minutes)

In a 1962 interview, Madame Lina Llubera Prokofiev, the composer's first wife, recalled her husband's working method at the time he wrote the *C Major Piano Concerto*: "Prokofiev toiled at his music. His capacity for work was phenomenal. He would sit down to work in the morning 'with a clear head,' as he said, either at the piano or at his writing desk. He usually composed his major works in the summer, in the mountains or at the seaside, away from the turmoil of city life. Always he sought places where the rhythm of work was not interrupted, where he could rest and take long walks. So it was with the *Third Piano Concerto*, which he completed during the summer of 1921 while staying at St. Brévin-les-Pins, a small village on the Atlantic coast of Brittany in France."

The composition of this *Concerto* was not a sudden inspiration for Prokofiev. The plan for a large virtuoso work to follow the first two piano concertos emerged in 1911, but he made little progress on it except for one passage he eventually placed at the end of the first movement. By 1913, he recalled in his memoirs, "I had composed a theme for variations, which I kept for a long time for subsequent use. In 1916-1917, I had tried several times to return to the *Third Concerto*. I wrote a beginning for it (two themes) and two variations on the theme for the second movement." At that time, he was also working on what he called a "white" quartet (i.e., in a diatonic style, playable on the white keys of the piano) but abandoned it because he

thought the result would be monotonous. He shuttled two themes from this aborted quartet into the *Concerto*. “Thus,” he continued in his autobiography, “when I began [in 1921] working on the *Third Concerto*, I already had the entire thematic material with the exception of the subordinate theme of the first movement and the third theme of the finale.”

Prokofiev completed the *Third Concerto* in time to take it on his 1921 American tour, which also included the world premiere, in Chicago, of his opera *The Love for Three Oranges*. The excitement (and publicity) surrounding that production generated a sympathetic interest in the new *Concerto* played by its composer, and the work was a considerable success at its first performance. Despite a cool reception when it was introduced to New York only a month later, this *Concerto* has become one of the most popular works of 20th-century music and a staple of the concert repertory.

Prokofiev provided the following description of the score: “The first movement opens quietly with a short introduction. The theme is announced by an unaccompanied clarinet and is continued by the violins for a few bars. Soon the tempo changes to *Allegro*, and the strings lead to the statement of the principal subject by the piano. Discussion of this theme is carried on in a lively manner, both the piano and the orchestra having a good deal to say on the matter. A passage in chords for the piano alone leads to the more expressive second subject, which is heard in the oboe with a pizzicato accompaniment. The second movement consists of a theme with five variations. The finale begins with a staccato theme for bassoons and pizzicato strings, which is interrupted by the blustering entry of the piano. The orchestra holds its own with the opening theme, however, and there is a good deal of argument, with frequent differences of opinion as regards key.

Eventually the piano takes up the first theme and develops it to a climax. With a reduction of tone and a slackening of tempo, an alternative theme is introduced in the woodwinds. The piano replies with a theme that is more in keeping with the caustic humor of the work. This material is developed, and there is a brilliant coda.”

The score calls for piccolo, flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, castanets and the usual strings.



ROBERT SCHUMANN

Born June 8, 1810 in Zwickau, Germany; died July 29, 1856 in Eudenberg, near Bonn.

SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN C MAJOR, OP. 61 (1846)

- First performed on November 5, 1846 in Leipzig, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn.
 - First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on February 5, 1986 with Yuri Krasnapolsky conducting. One subsequent performance occurred on January 14 & 15, 1995 with Kay George Roberts conducting.
- (Duration: ca. 36 minutes)*

The years 1845 and 1846 were difficult ones for Schumann. In 1844 he had gone on a concert tour of Russia with his wife, Clara, one of the greatest pianists of the era, and he was frustrated and humiliated at being recognized only as the husband of the featured performer and not in his own right as a distinguished composer and critic. The couple's return to Leipzig found Robert nervous, depressed and suffering from occasional lapses of memory. He

had a complete breakdown soon after, and his doctor advised the Schumanns to return to the quieter atmosphere of Dresden, where Robert had known happy times earlier in his life. They moved in October 1844, and Schumann recovered enough to completely sketch the *Second Symphony* in December of the following year. He began the orchestration in February, but many times found it impossible to work and could not finish the score until October.

Clara noted that her husband went night after night without sleep, arising in tears in the morning. His doctor described further symptoms: "So soon as he busied himself with intellectual matters, he was seized with fits of trembling, fatigue, coldness of the feet, and a state of mental distress culminating in a strange terror of death, which manifested itself in the fear inspired in him by heights, by rooms on an upper story, by all metal objects, even keys, and by medicines, and the fear of being poisoned." Schumann complained of continual ringing and roaring in his ears, and it was at times even painful for him to hear music. He was almost frantic for fear of losing his mind. His physical symptoms, he was convinced, were a direct result of his mental afflictions. He was wrong.

In an article in *The Musical Times*, Eric Sams investigated Schumann's illness, and his findings are both revealing. In those pre-antibiotic times, a common treatment for syphilis was a small dose of liquid mercury. The mercury relieved the external signs of the disease — but at the cost of poisoning the patient (victim?). Schumann, many years before his devoted marriage to Clara, had both the infection and the treatment. The problems he lamented — ringing ears, cold extremities, depression, sleeplessness, nerve damage — were the result of the mercury poisoning. Sensitive as he was, Schumann first imagined and then was truly afflicted with his other symptoms until he

became ill in both mind and body. It was, however, an insidious physical problem that led to his psychological woes rather than the other way around, as he believed.

Seen against this background of emotional and physical distress, Schumann's *Second Symphony* emerges as a miracle of the human spirit over the most trying circumstances. In his own words, "I was in bad shape when I began the work. However, I began to feel more myself when I finished the whole work." Of the philosophical basis of the *Symphony*, Mosco Carner wrote, "The emotional drama in this *Symphony* leads from the fierce struggle with sinister forces (first movement) to triumphant victory (finale), while the intervening stages are febrile restlessness (scherzo) and profound melancholy (adagio)." Schumann probably envisioned the work as a mirror of his return to health during its composition.

The *Second Symphony* is the most formally traditional of the four Schumann wrote, comprising four independent movements closely allied to Classical models. The sonata form of the first movement is prefaced by a slow introduction that presents a majestic, fanfare-like theme in the brass and a sinuous, legato melody in the strings. (The brass theme recurs several times during the work and serves as a motto linking this first movement with later ones.) The tempo quickens to begin the exposition, with the main theme heard in jagged, dotted rhythms. The second subject continues the mood of the main theme to complete the short exposition. The lengthy development section is largely based on the second theme. The recapitulation employs a rich orchestral palette to heighten the return of the exposition's themes, with the fanfare-motto heard briefly in the coda.

The *Scherzo* ("Schumann's happiest essay in this form," according to Robert Schauflyer) has

two trios: the first dominated by triplet rhythms in the woodwinds, the second by a legato chorale for strings. The horns and trumpets intone the motto theme at the end of the movement. The wonderful third movement is constructed around a nostalgic melody, one of Schumann's greatest inspirations, first presented by the violins. A brief, pedantic contrapuntal exercise acts as a middle section, after which the opening theme returns. The brilliant and vigorous finale is a sonata structure, with a

second theme derived from the opening notes of the melody of the preceding *Adagio*. The majestic coda begins with a soft restatement of the motto theme by trumpets and trombone, and gradually blossoms into a victorious hymn in the full brass choir.

The score calls for flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets in pairs, three trombones, timpani and the usual strings.