

Season 2015/2016

Friday, 10 June 2016

Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation, 8pm

Series: For Lovers

Conductor: **Fabrice Bollon**

Soloist: **Juliane Banse**, soprano

Program:

Richard Wagner

Tristan and Isolde – Prelude to Act III

Duration: approx. 8 minutes

Richard Wagner

Tristan and Isolde – Night Music from Act 2

Duration: approx. 10 minutes

Richard Wagner

Wesendonck Lieder for voice and orchestra WWV 91

The Angel

Be still!

In the Greenhouse

Sorrows

Dreams

Duration: approx. 20 minutes

Hector Berlioz

Romeo and Juliet – excerpts

Love Scene

Queen Mab Scherzo

Romeo alone, Festivities at Capulet's

Duration: approx. 39 minutes

Concertmaster: Tijana Milošević

The operatic tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, **Richard Wagner's** (1813-1883) life project, was the crown of his endeavour to integrate music and drama, as well as poetic and visual elements, in opera through the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept (total work of art). After his early works (*Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*), Wagner's operatic oeuvre evolved on the tradition of the Romantic opera (*Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*). Wagner's essay *Opera and Drama* from 1851 marked a shift in his treatment of opera, and his ideas were implemented in the four operas of the cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* - *The Rhinegold*, *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried* and *Twilight of the Gods*. The theme of these operas stems from the Germanic mythology – Icelandic song *Edda*, as well as the Nordic *Nibelungensaga*, which the composer fused together and then modified for the librettos, writing them in the reversed order than today's tetralogy sequence. While working on *Siegfried*, he composed another masterpiece, the opera *Tristan and Isolde*, based on a medieval love legend, whose musical language is considered the inception of the modern music, as well as the comic opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, both in the classical opera tradition. The last opera he composed was *Parsifal*.

In this concert, we will listen to two excerpts from *Tristan and Isolde*, the story of ill-fated love between young nobleman Tristan and princess Isolde. The climax and resolution of the drama comes in the final, 3rd Act. Tristan dies and Isolde sings the love song of parting, before she dies herself. She has a vision of Tristan, who has left to the world of the dead. As the only one who sees it, Isolde dies and goes to join him. Two trees grew from their graves, with their branches inseparably intertwined.

Richard Wagner's five songs for female voice and piano are nowadays known under the title ***Wesendonck Lieder***. The songs written to the poems by Wagner's friend Mathilde Wesendonck, with titles translating as *The Angel*, *Be still!*, *In the Greenhouse*, *Sorrows* and *Dreams*, were composed while Wagner was working on his opera *Tristan and Isolde*. The songs, together with the *Siegfried Idyll*, are the two non-operatic works by Wagner most regularly performed.

Mathilde Wesendonck was the wife of one of Richard Wagner's patrons, whom he met in Zurich, where he had fled on his escape from Saxony after the May Uprising in Dresden in 1849. At the time, Wagner and his wife Minna lived together in the *Asyl*, a small cottage on the Wesendonck estate. There are claims that Wagner and Mathilde had a love affair, which has remained uncertain. In any case, the obvious mutual attraction strongly influenced Wagner's stylistic expression in the conception of *Tristan and Isolde*.

Wagner sold the piece to a publisher in 1860, under the title *Five Songs for Female Voice*, while giving no name for the author of the texts at that time. Mathilde Wesendonck's name was not revealed until after her death in 1902, while controversies about the piece existed from the very beginning. There are still doubts as to whether Wagner's intention was to write a song cycle or a collection of individual pieces. The composer himself called two of the songs "studies" for *Tristan and Isolde*, using for the first time certain musical ideas that were later developed in the opera. In the *Dreams*, there are obvious roots of the love duet in Act 2, while *In the Greenhouse* he uses music later developed extensively for the prelude to Act 3.

After the initial version for female voice and piano, Wagner orchestrated the *Dreams* for chamber orchestra, which was performed on Mathilde's birthday as a serenade beneath her window. After that, the songs of this cycle were mostly performed separately.

The arrangement for large orchestra was made by Felix Mottl, an acclaimed conductor of Wagner's works. Over the years, the practice of performing the five songs as an integral cycle evolved.

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) had planned for a long time to create a choral symphony based on Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. His initial inspiration to compose such a piece came from a performance of *Hamlet* he witnessed, with the gorgeous Harriet Smithson in the role of Ophelia. In addition to the fascination by Shakespeare's work, he was also entirely captivated by the young actress, who became his obsession in the following years. Then, after the triumphant premiere of *Harold en Italie* in 1834, Berlioz received a commission from the violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini to write a piece, with a message: "Beethoven is dead and Berlioz alone can revive him". Berlioz left other projects aside and focused only on this piece. The result of this work is *Romeo et Juliette*, the symphonie dramatique for soloists, choir and orchestra.

Romeo et Juliette represents special homage to Shakespeare: the richness of his imagination, the vast range of feelings and moods, the diverse poetic invention and formal freedom. Having decided to avoid theatre conventions, Berlioz took Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and its choral finale as the model for his *Romeo et Juliette*. Drawing inspiration from the way Beethoven used vocal and dramatic elements in a symphony, Berlioz decided to express the emotions of Romeo and Juliette instrumentally, while using voices for the narrative. Thus, the symphony is structurally divided in seven parts, with the weight of the piece borne by the orchestra. Voices are used sporadically, until their full engagement in the finale.

Berlioz dedicated the score to Paganini, who had died before the first performance of *Romeo et Juliette*. The premiere at the Paris Conservatoire, by an orchestra of 200 musicians on the stage, scored a major triumph and this piece is still considered one of Berlioz's most mature and most successful works.

Tonight, we will hear a selection of orchestral excerpts from this monumental symphony, which lasts 95 minutes in its full version.

Asja Radonjić