

Season 2016/2017

Friday, 9 December 2016
Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation, 8pm

For Adventurers

Conductor: **Michail Jurowski**
Soloist: **Boris Brezovac**, viola

Programme:

H. Berlioz: *Harold in Italy, Symphony in Four Parts with Viola Obligato* Op. 16

Harold aux montagnes

Marche des pelerins chantant la priere du soir

Serenade d'un Montagnard des Abruzzes a sa Maitresse

Orgie des brigands, finale

Duration: approx. 45 minutes

R. Strauss: *Aus Italien*, tone poem Op. 16

In the Countryside - Andante

In Rome's ruins – Allegro con brio

On the Beach at Sorrento - Andantino

Neapolitan Folk Life – Allegro molto

Duration: approx. 45 minutes

Concertmaster: **Tijana Milošević**

Many 19th century artists were fascinated by Italy, the beauty of its landscapes and architecture, rich history and vibrant artistic and musical tradition. These include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Felix Mendelssohn, Hector Berlioz, Richard Strauss and many others.

The symphony *Harold in Italy* by **Hector Berlioz** (1803–1869) was originally conceived as a concerto for viola and orchestra, commissioned by the celebrated Italian virtuoso Niccolò Paganini. Namely, by playing this concerto, Paganini wanted to demonstrate the qualities of his new Stradivarius viola. Since he was not patient enough to wait until Berlioz has finished the entire piece, the composer showed him the first movement. However, Paganini disliked the lack of virtuosity in the viola part and abandoned the whole idea.

Berlioz then decided to write a four-movement symphony with a prominent viola role instead of the concerto. As he himself explained, his intention was to write a series of orchestral scenes, in which the solo viola would be involved as a more or less active participant while retaining its own character. *By placing it among the poetic memories formed from my wanderings in the Abruzzi, I wanted to make the viola a kind of melancholy dreamer in the manner of Byron's Childe-Harold*, said Berlioz.

The results of this was *Harold in Italy* (1834), the second of Berlioz's four symphonies. The title of the piece is a reference to the famous poem by English poet Lord George Gordon Byron, titled *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and the inspiration came from Berlioz's personal experiences from his journey through Italy.

The symphony was premiered on 23 November 1834 at the Conservatoire de Paris, under the baton of Narcisse Girard. The solo part was entrusted to Chretien Urhan. Paganini did not hear the work he had commissioned until December 1838; then he was so overwhelmed by it that, following the performance, he dragged Berlioz onto the stage and there knelt and kissed his hand before a wildly cheering audience and applauding musicians.

Berlioz had achieved some of the dominant features of this work, such as its programme, *idée fixe* and the autobiographical elements, in his first, *Symphonie fantastique*; however, these elements were employed here in a different way. The first movement represents a melancholic oasis of thoughts with surges of passionate happiness and, as such, it does not suggest any specific programmatic content. This movement sets the mood of this piece and brings in Harold's viola theme, which becomes a distinctive motto of the whole piece, superimposed over other orchestral voices, contrasting them in character and tempo. The eight-bar theme is symmetrical and complete, emphatically lyrical in nature, which makes it a recognizable feature throughout Berlioz's musical journey. The second movement develops a scene inspired by Italian peasants singing litanies on their way home from after a laborious day at work. Harold is captivated and touched by the song, but not converted by the pilgrims' spiritual values. The third movement resumes the presentation of Harold's perception of the world, this time inspired by his journeys outside of Rome. This is the point where Harold, i.e. the musical content played by the viola, shows the strongest tendency to fit into the world that surrounds him. The fourth movement is not an account of certain specific journey or scene, but rather a place where

Berlioz maintains the state of mind and spirit of a Romantic protagonist to develop the groundwork for correlating the themes from all previous movements.

Richard Strauss (1864–1949) composed the tone poem *Aus Italien* in 1886, when he was 24 years old. Encouraged by Johannes Brahms, Strauss travelled through Italy in the spring and summer of that year, visiting Florence, Rome, Bologna, Naples, Sorrento, Salerno and Capri. The young composer was mesmerized, like never before, by the beauty of the nature and the intensity of the inspiration that he drew from the ruins of ancient Rome. Strauss sketched the first ideas for the piece *Aus Italien* while still in Italy, including the special tonalities that he assigned to certain places and cities that he visited. The process of proper composing, however, started when he returned to Germany.

Aus Italien was completed on 12 September 1886, and premiered on 2 March 1887 in Munich, Strauss' hometown. The composer himself conducted the performance, and the piece was dedicated to his mentor Hans von Bülow. As Strauss and his sister Johanna recalled, the first three movements were welcomed with applause, whereas the final movement caused mixed reactions and disdainful whistles. Aware that the piece he had written had the potential to cause such reactions of the audience, Strauss confessed after the premiere, in his letter to a friend, that he believed that nobody had ever become a great artist without having thousands of people thinking that he was a lunatic.

Three years after the premiere, Strauss published a short overview of the programme template of his composition. The first movement represents the composer's feelings inspired by the sight of the sunny Campagna. In the second, Strauss was galvanized by the fantastic images of glorious Rome, now in ruins, which he watched with the feelings of melancholy and grief. Then, according to the composer, the third movement represents in tone painting *the tender music of nature*, which the inner ear perceives in the rustling of the wind in the leaves, in the songs of birds and the distant murmur of the sea, where a lonely song reaches the beach. That lonely song of nature, Strauss argued, stands in contrast to what the human listener experiences. The principal musical theme in the final, fourth movement is the tune of the well-known song *Funiculi, Funicula*, which was believed by Strauss to be a traditional folk song. However, it turned out later that the popular song was written by Italian composer Luigi Denza. The symphony ends with the *crazy orchestral fantasy*, which attempts to depict the colourful bustle of Naples in a *hilarious jumble of themes*.

Bojana Radovanović *

*In the season 2016/17, the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra offers an opportunity to selected young musicologists to enhance their professional training by writing programme notes.