

Belgrade Philharmonic
Season 2021-22
We Have Really Missed You

Friday, 19 November 2021

Gabriel Feltz
Annika Treutler, piano

Johannes Brahms
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 83

Allegro non troppo
Allegro appassionato
Andante
Allegretto grazioso – Un poco più presto

Duration: around 45 minutes

Rolf Liebermann
Furioso

Duration: around 10 minutes

Richard Strauss
Death and Transfiguration, Op. 24

Duration: around 23 minutes

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) wrote **Piano Concerto No. 2 in B minor, Op. 83** in the period of his full creative maturity, when he had achieved the pinnacle of his fame and recognition from critics and audiences across Europe. However, the fact that he finished this piece nearly 22 years after he wrote his first concerto and the fact that it took him from 1878 to 1881 to finish it indicates that he was always self-critical. It premiered in Budapest in November of 1881, with Brahms himself playing the piano. Even today this concerto remains one of the most extensive and complex scores written for piano and orchestra.

Instead of the usual three, Piano Concerto No. 2 has four movements. The first movement, written in sonata form, opens with the call of a horn, which, supported by the piano, introduces the atmosphere of the movement. A solo cadence soon follows, which is in an unusual place in relation to traditional practice, and announces the virtuosic nature of the movement. Whenever it seems that the drama could get out of control, the composer reintroduces the initial theme of the horn, performed either by the horn or another instrument from a different orchestral group. The scherzo, a form that is not so often found in concertante works, is actually the most dramatic and turbulent movement, while the third movement is slow and very melodic and is based on an eight-bar phrase in the cello section. The graceful and relaxed rondo in the final movement is characterized by brilliance, through the construction of several aggressive climaxes in the solo section, to a return to the introductory theme and the final explosive orchestral crescendo.

Swiss composer **Rolf Liebermann** (1910-1999) was a prominent figure in European musical life. He worked as artistic director of opera houses from Hamburg and Paris and at the same time was active as a composer. His compositional oeuvre encompassed several different musical genres, including chansons, as well as classical and popular music. In the field of classical music, his stylistic expression is characterized by a combination of styles and techniques, including those derived from Baroque, classical, and twelve-tone music.

His most famous orchestral piece ***Furioso*** premiered in 1947 at the Darmstadt Music Days and its uncompromising wildness brought Liebermann international fame for the first time. Barely 10 minutes in duration, the work is in three parts: a trombone ostinato, a recurring toccata-like *verse* in the piano, and huge rhythmic counterpoint in the orchestra.

During the 19th century, music gained prestige until the moment when it began to be considered the most important of all arts. In a time of rapid social change and scientific progress, many people questioned established traditions, and art - especially music - seemed to provide spiritual stability in a time filled with doubt. In stark contrast to this cultural climate, **Richard Strauss** (1864-1949) wrote *Death and Transfiguration*, a work that explores the mystery of death and what may come after. This tonal poem is the most ambitious of all his previous works (he was 25 at the time). Although Strauss adopted secular life principles as a very young man, he painted the psychological states of a dying man in an exceptional way, with almost scientific precision, using the most advanced orchestral and harmonic solutions of his time. The work was not based on any personal experience, but history does record that the composer said on his deathbed in 1949: *dying is just as I composed it in "Death and Transfiguration."*

Through four sections of the symphonic poem, Strauss describes a man who remembers his life on his deathbed: from a carefree childhood, through youth and youthful love, to unfulfilled desires and ideals that he never achieved. At the moment when death is approaching, the music disappears with the sound of the gong: the soul leaves the body only to find itself and fulfill in infinite space everything it had not achieved in this world.

Asja Radonjić, M. Sc.