

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Friday, September 27, 2019 at 7:30pm

Saturday, September 28, 2019 at 8:00pm

Sunday, September 29, 2019 at 3:00pm

Romantic Brahms

Donald Runnicles, conductor

Sarah Jeffrey, oboe

Johannes Brahms

Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op. 90

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Andante
- III. Poco allegretto
- IV. Allegro

Intermission

Richard Strauss

Concerto in D Major for Oboe and Small Orchestra

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Andante
- III. Vivace

Richard Strauss

Tod und Verklärung (Death and Transfiguration), Op. 24

As a courtesy to musicians, guest artists, and fellow concertgoers, please put your phone away and on silent during the performance.

ABOUT THE WORKS

Johannes Brahms

Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op. 90

Born: Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833

Died: Vienna, Austria, Apr 3, 1897

Composed: 1883

33
min

In 1853, Brahms had joined with Robert Schumann and a pupil of Schumann's, Albert Dietrich, in writing a work for violin and piano titled the *F–A–E Sonata*, as a gift to violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim—the title referring to Joachim's personal motto “Frei aber Einsam” (free but alone). Brahms subsequently, and perhaps wishfully, adopted the motto “Frei aber Froh” (free but happy) for himself. But in fact, it took him a long time to free himself from his awe of Beethoven, even though many saw him as the earlier composer's true symphonic heir. “I shall never write a symphony,” Brahms vowed to conductor Hermann Levi. “You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like [Beethoven] behind us.”

Almost 20 years passed after he began work on Symphony No. 1 before he felt it was ready to be played in public. The première in 1876 won great success, allaying, for a while at least, his own doubts. Heartened, he started work on Symphony No. 2 right away, in the summer of 1877, completing it in November of the same year. Where the First Symphony takes the listener on what music educator Blair Johnston describes as “a Beethovenian spiritual journey,” the Second Symphony is sensuous and voluptuous in a way that evoked almost immediate comparisons to Beethoven's “Pastoral” Symphony—something that likely both dismayed and delighted Brahms.

It was then another five or six years—during which he completed his Violin Concerto,

two notable overtures (the *Tragic Overture* and the *Academic Festival Overture*), and Piano Concerto No. 2—before he turned to symphonic form again.

After playing through Symphony No. 3 at the piano, Brahms's close friend, Clara Schumann, wrote to him: “All the movements seem to be of one piece, one beat of the heart, each one a jewel.” Part of what gives it its striking unity is that the composer's “Frei aber Froh” (F–A–F) motto underpins the entire work, which is striking for its mixture of passion and pessimism, of restlessness and serenity. It is a compelling, highly revealing musical self-portrait.

The first movement is rich with incident and feeling, right from the opening F–A–F, carried by the winds over a sequence of three chords. A stormy first theme, also built on the motto, follows, as surges of emotion, doubting and positive alike, roll across the movement's richly textured surface. The following two movements are peaceful by comparison. Only at the climax of the second movement does its overall atmosphere of almost rustic gentleness give way to a more heated style of utterance. The third movement is a dance: slow, melancholy, hauntingly beautiful. The symphony's emotional conflicts are resumed in the finale, with the F–A–F motto re-emerging in the final bars, as the music winds down, resigned and almost exhausted, yet at the same time serene.

Program note by Don Anderson

Richard Strauss

Concerto in D Major for Oboe and Small Orchestra

Born: Munich, Germany, Jun 11, 1864

Died: Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, Sep 8, 1949

Composed: 1945

26
min

Strauss's declining years were troubled ones. In 1933, the year that Hitler was elected, the Nazi party had made Strauss president of the Reichsmusikkammer, created to promote "good German music." It was a post that turned out to be as uncomfortable for the Nazis as it was for Strauss—he had defended Stefan Zweig, Jewish librettist for his 1935 comic opera, *Die schweigsame Frau* (*The Silent Woman*), and his son was married to a Jewish woman. Too eminent to be prosecuted without public outcry, he retired to his home in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Bavaria, occasionally sallying forth to conduct, but suffering great privations both during the Second World War and after. Rich on paper because of accumulated performing rights, he could not get any of the money so long as he remained in Germany, and on top of that, because of his Reichsmusikkammer presidency, he had to face a denazification court.

It was during this immediate post-war time that the idea of composing an oboe concerto was suggested to him by John de Lancie, a US serviceman stationed in Garmisch, who was also second oboe of the Philadelphia Orchestra. The suggestion reignited Strauss's lifelong interest in the orchestra as an assembly of individuals substantiated in their profession, like his own father who had been a great horn player. He completed it in short score at Garmisch on September 14, 1945, after which he and his wife went to Switzerland and stayed in Baden, between Zurich and Basel, where he wrote the full score. The first performance took place at Zurich at a concert of the Tonhalle Orchestra on February 26, 1946. (De Lancie,

incidentally, as second oboe, never got to play it at Philadelphia.)

The three movements of the Oboe Concerto are formally complete in themselves, yet are seamlessly linked and thematically interdependent: the tiny figure in the cellos that opens the work is carried into the slow movement, around the eight-minute mark; the theme that anchors the second group in the first movement (it begins with four repeated notes, which makes it easy to spot) reappears as the mid-section of the slow movement; and a melodic fragment in the cadenza at the end of the slow movement becomes the main rondo theme of the finale. There are actually two cadenzas—the one already mentioned, 16 or 17 minutes in, and a second one, heralded by a tonic chord from the whole orchestra, just before the coda of the finale. This work as a whole has an effortless lyrical flow to it, belying the nearly killing demands it makes on the technique (circular breathing is a must!) of the soloist, whose part is almost continuous, being relieved only rarely by the whole orchestra.

Program note by David Perlman

Richard Strauss

Tod und Verklärung (*Death and Transfiguration*), Op. 24

Born: Munich, Germany, Jun 11, 1864

Died: Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, Sep 8, 1949

Composed: 1888–1889

24
min

The tone poem, or symphonic poem, enjoyed about 100 years of popularity, from the 1820s onward. It can be as long as an entire symphonic movement, or indeed an entire symphony, but is characterized by the fact that it usually consists of a single movement and is programmatic in nature, intended to inspire listeners to imagine particular scenes,

ABOUT THE WORKS

events, or moods. Shortly after Strauss completed *Don Juan*, his second tone poem and the first to win success, he set to work on a third such piece, *Death and Transfiguration*, conducting the première in Eisenach, Germany, on June 21, 1890.

Five years later, he revealed his inspiration for this initially terrifying yet ultimately uplifting work in a letter to a friend: “The idea came to me to write a tone poem describing the last hours of a man who has striven for the highest ideals, presumably an artist. The sick man lies in bed breathing heavily and irregularly in his sleep. Friendly dreams bring a smile to the face of the sufferer; his sleep grows lighter; he awakens. Fearful pains begin once more to torture him, fever shakes his body. When the attack is over and the pain recedes, he recalls his past life; his childhood passes before his eyes; his youth with its striving and passions and then, while the pains return, there appears to him the goal of his life’s journey, the ideal, which he attempts to embody in his art, but which he was unable to perfect because such perfection can be achieved by

no man. The fatal hour arrives. The soul leaves the body, to discover in the eternal cosmos the magnificent realization of the ideal which could not be fulfilled here below.”

Death and Transfiguration is a purely imaginary work, since the 25-year-old had not undergone any life-threatening experiences by that point in his life. It displayed remarkable maturity for one so young, in terms of creative confidence, philosophical ambition, and the skillful handling of a large, post-Romantic orchestra. In it, he led listeners on a harrowing but ultimately heartening, Beethoven-like journey from darkness to light.

Some 60 years later, he would quote the noble, symbolically rising “transfiguration” theme of this work in the concluding section of the *Four Last Songs*, composed in 1948, after the soloist has sung the work’s final words, “Can this perhaps be death?” And as he lay on his deathbed, in September 1949, he is said to have whispered to his daughter-in-law, Alice, “Dying is just as I composed it in *Death and Transfiguration*.”

Program note by Don Anderson

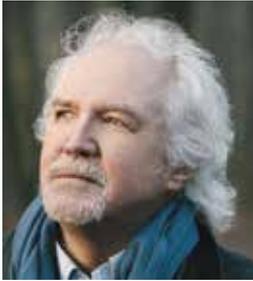
MAJESTIC BRUCKNER WITH DONALD RUNNICLES

FEB 20 & 22, 2020

Donald Runnicles returns to lead Bruckner’s radiant Seventh Symphony alongside Wagner’s *Siegfried Idyll*—one of the composer’s most beautiful and personal orchestral creations, written on his wedding day!

FOR TICKETS
TSO.CA
416.593.1285

THE ARTISTS



Donald Runnicles conductor

Donald Runnicles made his TSO début in March 1994.

Donald Runnicles is the General Music Director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival, as well as Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. In 2019, Runnicles also took up the post of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's first-ever Principal Guest Conductor. He additionally holds the title of Conductor Emeritus of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, having served as Chief Conductor from 2009 to 2016. Runnicles enjoys close and enduring relationships with many of the leading opera companies and symphony orchestras, and he is especially celebrated for his interpretations of Romantic and post-Romantic repertoire, which are core to his musical identity.

In the 2019/20 season, Runnicles returns to the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for the fourth time and makes his début with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, in addition to his regular concerts with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and Sydney Symphony Orchestra. At the Deutsche Oper, highlights of Runnicles's season include the première of *Das Rheingold* as part of an ambitious new Ring Cycle extending through 2021, as well as a new production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which continues Runnicles's Britten cycle at the house. He also conducts seven revival titles and brings the company to the Edinburgh Festival in a performance of *Manon Lescaut*.

Previous posts include: Music Director of the San Francisco Opera (1992–2008), during which he led world premières of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* and Conrad Susa's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, and the US Première of Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise*; Principal Conductor of the Orchestra of St. Luke's (2001–2007); and General Music Director of the Theater Freiburg and Orchestra (1989–1993).

His extensive discography includes complete recordings of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, Mozart's Requiem, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Britten's *Billy Budd*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, and Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. His recording of Wagner arias with Jonas Kaufmann and the Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper Berlin won the 2013 Gramophone Award for Best Vocal Recording, and his recording of Janáček's *Jenůfa* with the Orchestra and Chorus of the Deutsche Oper Berlin was nominated for a 2016 GRAMMY® Award for Best Opera Recording. Most recently, he released a recording of Aribert Reimann's new opera, *L'invisible*.

Born and raised in Edinburgh, he was appointed OBE in 2004, and holds honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

THE ARTISTS



Sarah Jeffrey **oboe**

TSO Principal Oboe Sarah Jeffrey joined the TSO in 2006.

Hailed by critics for her “exquisite solo work” (*The Globe and Mail*), “luscious tone” (*Toronto Star*), and sensitive musicianship, Sarah Jeffrey is Principal Oboe of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. A regular soloist with the TSO, Sarah has also appeared as soloist with numerous orchestras across Canada, performing works by Bach, Mozart, Vaughan Williams, Marcello, Haydn, and Mozetich. She is also an active recitalist and chamber musician, making frequent guest appearances with the Amici Chamber Ensemble, the ARC Ensemble, and Trio Arkel.

A devoted performer of new music, Ms. Jeffrey has commissioned several chamber works, including *Chaconne for Oboe, Horn, and Piano* by Erik Ross, and *Rhapsody* by Ronald Royer.

Ms. Jeffrey is a recipient of the Ontario Arts Council’s Chalmers Award for Creativity and Excellence in the Arts, and teaches regularly at Canada’s finest music schools. A passionate and devoted teacher, Sarah is on faculty at The Glenn Gould School at The Royal Conservatory and the University of Toronto, and spends her summers at the Orford Arts Centre and with the National Youth Orchestra of Canada. She can be heard discussing the finer points of the oboe on CBC radio, both as a performer and as a guest on several podcasts.

Sarah shares her life with her husband, TSO Horn Gabriel Radford, their two children, Evelyn and Aidan, and Jack the cat. In her spare time, Sarah enjoys travelling, cooking, swimming in cold lakes, hiking, and, of course, the art of reed making.

HEAR RICHARD STRAUSS’S ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA

JUN 17, 20 & 21, 2020

As part of Davis Conducts & Plays Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony—which will feature Interim Artistic Director Sir Andrew Davis leading the Orchestra from the pipe organ at Roy Thomson Hall—Strauss’s tone poem, which was immortalized in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, will be performed in full.

FOR TICKETS
TSO.CA
416.593.1285