

Leon Fleisher conducts

the Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Friday, February 16, 2018 at 8:00pm

Prelude Recital at 6:45pm

Pre-concert Talk at 7:15pm

This is the 802nd concert in Koerner Hall

Leon Fleisher, conductor

Jocelyn Fralick, soprano

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven: Overture to *Egmont*, op. 84

Richard Strauss: *Four Last Songs*, TrV 296

“Frühling”

“September”

“Beim Schlafengehen”

“Im Abendrot”

INTERMISSION

Jean Sibelius: Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, op. 39

- I. Andante ma non troppo: Allegro energico
- II. Andante, ma non troppo lento
- III. Scherzo: Allegro
- IV. Finale: Quasi una Fantasia

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; died in Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827

Overture to *Egmont*, op. 84 (1809-10)

Beethoven wrote an overture and incidental music for a revival of Goethe's heroic drama *Egmont* in 1810, between his Sixth and Seventh Symphonies. Its theme of political oppression resonated with the composer who could trace his ancestry to the play's setting in Flanders. The overture previews the action and emotional conflicts of Goethe's 1786 tragedy. Tyranny and a fatal outcome are reflected in the slow, heavy tread of the introduction, while the pleading of an oppressed people is reflected in the subsequent supplicatory woodwind reply. The coda, with its resounding horn fanfares and pounding rhythms heralds a brief 'Victory Symphony' which sounds at the death of Count Egmont as he goes to the scaffold. Egmont's moral victory is celebrated in one of the finest of Beethoven's overtures.

Richard Strauss

Born in Munich, Germany, June 11, 1864; died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, September 8, 1949

***Four Last Songs*, TrV 296 (1948)**

Strauss composed more than 200 lieder, his first at the age of six and his last – the *Four Last Songs* – at 84. Three quarters of them date from the 19th century, particularly from the early years of his marriage to soprano Pauline de Ahna. He frequently accompanied her in recital and the pair toured widely between the years 1894 and 1905. It is fitting that Strauss's highly productive career should end with the four reflective, deeply personal outpourings of the *Four Last Songs*. Together, they celebrate a love of life and shared happiness over many years while facing, with honesty and compassion, the inevitability of an approaching end. The songs also celebrate Strauss's glorious melodic writing for the soprano voice, underpinned by a no less radiant and sumptuous orchestral texture. He wrote them between May and September 1948, at the age of 84, exactly one year before his death and after 55 years of marriage to the soprano who inspired much of his finest writing for the voice. The first three songs are settings of poems by Hermann Hesse who had recently received the 1946 Nobel Prize for Literature. "Frühling" ("Spring") celebrates the renewal of life and love brought about with the arrival of spring, viewed here through the lens of an older poet and composer. "September" brings with it the end of summer, a time of decay and exhaustion and the need for rest. "Beim Schlafengehen" ("Going to sleep") finds comfort in deep sleep while the soul soars in free flight. "Im Abendrot" ("At Sunset") is the most tangibly personal setting and the first song to be completed. As early as 1946, Strauss had been struck by the appositeness of these words by the 19th century lyric poet Joseph von Eichendorff to his own life with Pauline. Two ageing, long-time companions seeking rest are contrasted with a pair of larks soaring upwards as the world darkens all around. Strauss was a political refugee in Switzerland at the time, confronting old age and money concerns, not to mention the widespread exhaustion and spiritual destruction brought about by Nazism and two World Wars. "Is this perhaps death?" are the final words of the song that the companions share. A clear answer is provided as the French horn, English horn, and violas invoke the 'transfiguration' motif from Strauss's tone-poem, *Death and Transfiguration*, composed some six decades earlier. Strauss did not indicate that he viewed the four songs as a cycle. The prevailing order of the songs was established by Ernst Roth, Strauss's editor at Boosey & Hawkes, in its posthumous publication. A fifth song, "Malven," was left incomplete, without orchestration, at the time of Strauss's death. Yet another, a new orchestration of "Ruhe, meine Seele," originally part of a wedding present for Pauline, has been suggested as an intended fifth song for the collection. But time has agreed in the completeness of the *Four Last Songs* (Roth's title) as Strauss's leave-taking, a score that bids adieu with a serenity and poignancy brought about through embracing the comfort of death.

“Frühling”

Hermann Hesse (1877-1962)

In dämmerigen Grüften
träumte ich lang
von deinen Bäumen und blauen Lüften,
von deinem Duft und Vogelsang.

Nun liegst du erschlossen
in Gleich und Zier
von Licht übergossen
wie ein Wunder vor mir.

Du kennst mich wieder,
du lockst mich zart,
es zittert durch all meine Glieder
deine selige Gegenwart!

“September”

Hesse

Der Garten trauert,
kühl sinkt in die Blumen der Regen.
Der Sommer schauert
still seinem Ende entgegen.

Golden tropft Blatt um Blatt
nieder vom hohen Akazienbaum.
Sommer lächelt erstaunt und matt
in den sterbenden Gartentraum.

Lange noch bei den Rosen
bleibt er stehen, sehnt sich nach Ruh.
Langsam tut er
die müdgeword'nen Augen zu.

“Spring”

In dim chasms
I dreamed long
of your trees and your blue breezes,
of your perfume and your birdsong.

Now you lie revealed
gleaming and beautiful
suffused with light
like a miracle before me.

You recognize me once more,
you lure me gently,
all my limbs tremble
with your blessed presence!

“September”

The garden mourns,
the cool rain sinks into the flowers.
Summer shudders
quietly towards its end.

Leaf after golden leaf drops
down from the tall acacia.
Summer smiles astonished and exhausted
on the garden's dying dream.

Near the roses long
it still lingers, yearning for rest.
Slowly it closes
its eyes that have grown tired.

“Beim Schlafengehen”

Hesse

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,
soll mein sehnlisches Verlangen
freundlich die gestirnte Nacht
wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, laßt von allem Tun,
Stirn vergiß du alles Denken,
alle meine Sinne nun
wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht
will in freien Flügen schweben,
um im Zauberkreis der Nacht
tief und tausendfach zu leben.

“Im Abendrot”

Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857)

Wir sind durch Not und Freude
gegangen Hand in Hand;
vom Wandern ruhen wir
nun überm stillen Land.

Rings sich die Täler neigen,
es dunkelt schon die Luft.
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen
nachträumend in den Duft.

Tritt her und laß sie schwirren,
bald ist es Schlafenszeit;
daß wir uns nicht verirren
in dieser Einsamkeit.

O weiter, stiller Friede!
So tief im Abendrot,
wie sind wir wandermüde –
ist dies etwa der Tod?

“At Sunset”

Through troubles and joy
we have gone hand in hand;
from wandering we rest

“Going to Sleep”

Now the day has made me tired,
the starry night shall welcome and receive
my yearning and my longing
like a tired child.

Hands, refrain from all action,
brow, forget all thought,
all my senses now
wish to sink into slumber.

And the soul, unguarded,
would soar in free flight,
to live a thousandfold, profoundly,
in Night's enchanted sphere.

now above the quiet countryside.

All around, the valleys slope away,
the air is already growing dark.
Two larks only still climb
dreamily into the haze.

Come to me and let them flutter,
soon it will be time to sleep;
let us not lose our way
in this solitude.

O far-spread, quiet peace!
So deep in the sunset,
how tired we are from wandering –
is this perhaps Death?

Jean Sibelius

Born in Hämeenlinna, Finland, December 8, 1865; died in Järvenpää, Finland, September 20, 1957

Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, op. 39 (1898-9)

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius was 34, with several large-scale orchestral works behind him, by the time he completed his 'official' First Symphony in 1899. He viewed the rhapsodic, programmatic *Kullervo* symphony, written six years earlier, as more symphonic poem than true symphony. Based on the Finnish nationalistic epic, *Kalevala*, this 70-minute symphony with two vocal movements immediately brought him to the attention of nationalists. It paved the way for the First Symphony, which was a triumph when Sibelius himself conducted its first performance in Helsinki, April 26, 1899.

The work opens enigmatically, with a lonely clarinet melody, accompanied at the outset by a roll on the timpani. Out of the clouds comes a more focused theme on strings and, with it, an unmistakable feeling that the symphony is going to evolve on a large scale. The power of the writing is asserted as the music builds to a stirring climax, with ringing brass – they are to be a memorable feature of the entire symphony. Chattering woodwinds herald another group of themes. Like everything heard so far, the new themes appear to grow out of the opening clarinet theme. Underlining the entire first movement is a sense of pent-up strength and energy, which Sibelius, with his emerging symphonic mastery, unleashes in waves.

The latent melancholy of the opening movement is given full expression in the slow movement. Even when Sibelius breaks away from the main theme for contrasting, often fiery episodes, a melancholy mood prevails. The tolling, dotted rhythm of its Tchaikovsky-like opening melody is a unifying element throughout. In the Scherzo, the mood turns more urgent, almost bitter. Its volatile energy is broken by a trio that is pure Sibelius. It is unsettling in its harmonies and forward-looking to the lonely, isolated voice of the composer of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies. The passionate, yearning theme with which the finale opens is familiar. It is a more sonorous version of the clarinet theme from the opening. It forms the first of several themes that build towards a grand C major melody of epic, romantic grandeur and release. In his later symphonies, Sibelius was to weave the finale's directness and romantic surge into structures of greater subtlety and elusiveness. For the present, however, the young Sibelius enjoys his ability to create an epic quality in his symphonic writing. He pauses briefly at the work's conclusion to rein in the easily won expansiveness of the writing. The mood is sombre and the symphony winds up in E minor, the dark key that predominates.

- Program notes © 2018 Keith Horner

Leon Fleisher

Conductor

Pianist Leon Fleisher thrives in a sustained career as conductor and soloist, recitalist, chamber music artist, and master class mentor. He made his debut with the New York Philharmonic in 1944 and in 1952 became the first American to win the prestigious Queen Elisabeth of Belgium competition, establishing himself as one of the world's premier classical pianists. At the height of his success, he was suddenly struck at age 36 with a neurological affliction later identified as focal dystonia, rendering two fingers on his right hand immobile. Rather than end his career, Mr. Fleisher began focusing on repertoire for the left hand only, conducting, and teaching. In the mid-1990s, he was able to return to playing with both hands after experimental treatments using a regimen of Rolfing and 'botulinum toxin' injections. A recipient of numerous honours and awards, he received the honour of Commander in the Order of Arts and Letters by the Minister of Culture of the French government as well as the Kennedy Center Honors in 2007 and is the subject of the 2006 Oscar and Emmy nominated documentary film, *Two Hands*. In 2013, Sony Classical issued a 23-CD box set of his entire recorded output and, in 2014, Mr. Fleisher released his first solo CD in a decade, the Grammy nominated *All The Things You Are*. In addition to his teaching at Peabody, Mr. Fleisher continues

with an international schedule of master classes, performances, and orchestral guest conducting. He is the Ihnatowycz Chair in Piano at The Royal Conservatory.

Jocelyn Fralick

Soprano

Recent graduate of The Glenn Gould School, Jocelyn Fralick is thrilled to be returning to Koerner Hall to sing Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with the Royal Conservatory Orchestra.

Originally from the Niagara region, Ms. Fralick has performed with many organizations in the area, including Chorus Niagara, Chorus Hamilton, Choralis Camerata, and, most recently, with the Niagara Symphony at the brand new First Ontario Performing Arts Centre in a tribute concert to legendary Boston Pops Conductor Arthur Fiedler. In May of 2018, she will return to Niagara to sing Mozart's Mass in C Major with Chorus Niagara.

Ms. Fralick has recently returned from Italy where she sang Donna Elvira in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* under the direction of Stuart Baker and Leslie Dala with the CO-SI program. Her past opera credits include il Cavaliere Armidoro in Niccolò Piccini's *La Cecchina*, Maguelonne in Pauline Viardot's *Cendrillon*, and Kitty Hart in Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*.

While at The Glenn Gould School, she studied with Monica Whicher and Rachel Andrist. She also holds a Bachelor of Music and Education from the University of Toronto, where she studied with Jean MacPhail.

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Joaquin Valdepeñas, Resident Conductor

The Royal Conservatory Orchestra (RCO), part of the Temerty Orchestral Program, is widely regarded as an outstanding ensemble and one of the best training orchestras in North America. The Conservatory's orchestral students gain critical performance experience in the acoustically renowned Koerner Hall, as well as invaluable musical insights by being led by such distinguished conductors as Gábor Takács-Nagy, Tania Miller, Ihnatowycz Chair in Piano Leon Fleisher, and Johannes Debus this season; past guest conductors have included Sir Roger Norrington, Peter Oundjian, Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw, Ivars Taurins, Julian Kuerti, Nathan Brock, Uri Mayer, Lior Shambadal, Bramwell Tovey, and Tito Muñoz. The RCO ensures that instrumental students in the Performance Diploma Program and the Artist Diploma Program of The Glenn Gould School graduate with extensive orchestral performance experience. Additionally, at least two winners of The Glenn Gould School Concerto Competition have the opportunity to appear each year as soloists with the RCO. Graduates of the RCO have joined the ranks of the greatest orchestras in the world, including the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the BBC Orchestra, the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, Tafelmusik, the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus. The RCO has been invited to perform at the Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre in Kingston this season, has been heard on *CBC Radio*, and has toured China during the 2004-05 season.

