

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Work for Organ and Orchestra (2016)

ERIC EWAZEN ■ BORN IN 1954

Eric Ewazen, born in Cleveland on March 1, 1954, studied at the Eastman School of Music (B.M.) and Juilliard School (M.M. and D.M.A); his composition teachers have included Samuel Adler, Milton Babbitt, Gunther Schuller, Warren Benson and Joseph Schwantner. Ewazen (ee-WAY-zen) has taught at Juilliard since 1980, and has also served on the faculties of the Hebrew Arts School and Lincoln Center Institute and been a guest composer and held master classes at the Birmingham (UK) Conservatory, Brigham Young University, University of Hawaii, UCLA, University of Texas at Austin, Indiana University, University of Maryland, Christopher Newport University, Mercer College, Brisbane Conservatory, Sydney Conservatory, Australian National University, University of Hawaii, Mahidol University in Bangkok and many other noted schools of music. From 1982 to 1989, Ewazen was Vice President of the United States Section of the League of Composers–International Society of Contemporary Music. He served as Composer-in-Residence with the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble of New York City from 1996 to 1999, and has also lectured in the New York Philharmonic's "Musical Encounters" series. During 1999, he was a guest at the Bellingham (Washington) Summer Music Festival, Craftsbury (Vermont) Chamber Music Series and National Flute Association convention in Atlanta; in June 2001,

he was Composer-in-Residence with the International Horn Society Convention at Western Michigan University. Ewazen's honors include a Tanglewood Fellowship, BMI Award, Louis Lane Prize, Gershwin Memorial Foundation Fellowship and Rodgers & Hammerstein Scholarship.

Tod und Verklärung ("Death and Transfiguration"), Op. 24 (1888-1889)

RICHARD STRAUSS ■ 1864-1949

Death and Transfiguration was completed just in time for Richard Strauss' 26th birthday. It is a remarkable achievement both in conception and execution for such a young musician, especially since composition was really just a second career for Strauss at the time. By 1887, Strauss was one of the fastest-rising stars in the European conducting firmament, having taken up his first podium engagement at the tender age of nineteen as assistant to the renowned Hans von Bülow at Meiningen. Appointments at the opera houses of Munich, Bayreuth and Weimar, as well as a guest visit to conduct the greatest orchestra of the time, the Berlin Philharmonic, all preceded the premiere of *Death and Transfiguration*, in June 1890. Strauss' schedule was hectic, and it is a tribute to his stamina and ambition that he was able to balance two full-time careers with such excellent success. Throughout his life he remained one of the most highly regarded and sought-after conductors in the world, reaching the pinnacle of his

acclaim when he was appointed director of the Vienna Opera in 1919.

It was at his first conducting post that Strauss began composing his tone poems. *Death and Transfiguration* was the third of these, following *Macbeth* (1887) and *Don Juan* (1888). The literary inspiration for *Death and Transfiguration* originated with Strauss himself, as he noted in a letter to his friend Friedrich von Hausegger in 1894: “It was six years ago when the idea came to me to write a tone poem describing the last hours of a man who had striven for the highest ideals, presumably an artist. The sick man lies in his bed breathing heavily and irregularly in his sleep. Friendly dreams bring a smile to his face; his sleep grows lighter; he awakens. Fearful pains once more begin 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 strivings and passions; and then, when the pain returns, there appears to him the goal of his life’s journey — the idea, the ideal which he attempted to embody in his art, but which he was unable to perfect because such perfection could be achieved by no man. The fatal hour arrives. The soul leaves his body, to discover in the eternal cosmos the magnificent realization of the ideal which could not be fulfilled here below.”

Strauss’ composition follows his literary program with almost clinical precision. It is divided into four sections. The first summons forth the vision of the sickroom and the irregular heartbeat and distressed sighs of the man/artist. The second section, in a faster tempo, is a vivid and violent portrayal of his suffering. The ensuing, slower section, beginning tenderly and representing the artist’s remembrance of his life, is broken off suddenly when the anguished music

of the second part returns. This ultimate, painful struggle ends in death, signified by a stroke of the gong. The final section, hymnal in mood, depicts the artist’s vision of ultimate beauty as he is transfigured into part of “the eternal cosmos.”

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78, “Organ” (1886)

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS ■ 1835-1921

“There goes the French Beethoven,” declared Charles Gounod to a friend as he pointed out Camille Saint-Saëns at the Paris premiere of the “Organ” Symphony. This was high praise, indeed, and not without foundation. Though the depths of feeling that Beethoven plumbed were never accessible to Saint-Saëns, both musicians largely devoted their lives to the great abstract forms of instrumental music — symphony, concerto, sonata — that are the most difficult to compose and the most rewarding to accomplish. This was no mean feat for Saint-Saëns.

The Paris in which Saint-Saëns grew up, studied and lived was enamored of the vacuous stage works of Meyerbeer, Offenbach and a host of lesser lights in which little attention was given to artistic merit, only to convention and entertainment. Berlioz tried to break this stranglehold of mediocrity, and earned for himself a reputation as an eccentric, albeit a talented one, whose works were thought unperformable, and probably best left to the pedantic Germans anyway. Saint-Saëns, with his love of Palestrina, Rameau, Beethoven, Liszt and, above all, Mozart, also determined not to be enticed into the *Opéra Comique* but to follow his calling toward a more noble art. To this end, he established with some like-minded colleagues the *Société Nationale de Musique* in 1871 to perform the serious concert works of

French composers. The venture was a success, and did much to give a renewed sense of artistic purpose to the best Gallic musicians.

Saint-Saëns produced a great deal of music to promote the ideals of the *Société Nationale de Musique*, including ten concertos and various smaller works for solo instruments and orchestra, four tone poems, two orchestral suites and five symphonies, the second and third of which were unpublished for decades and discounted in the usual numbering of these works. The last of the symphonies, the No. 3 in C minor, is his masterwork in the genre. Saint-Saëns placed much importance on this composition. He pondered it for a long time and realized it with great care, unusual for this artist, who said of himself that he composed music “as an apple tree produces apples,” that is, naturally and without visible effort. “I have given in this Symphony,” he confessed, “everything that I could give.”

Saint-Saëns wrote, “This Symphony is divided into two parts, though it includes practically the traditional four movements. The first, checked in development, serves as an introduction to the *Adagio*. In the same manner, the scherzo is connected with the finale.” Saint-Saëns clarified the division of the two parts by using the organ only in the second half of each: dark and rich in Part I, noble and uplifting in Part II. The entire work is unified by transformations of the main theme, heard in the strings at the beginning after a brief and mysterious introduction. In his “Organ” Symphony, Saint-Saëns combined the techniques of thematic transformation, elision of movements and richness of orchestration with a clarity of thought and grandeur of vision to create a masterpiece of French symphonic music.

ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

MARCH 11 AND 12, 2017
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Work for Organ and Orchestra ERIC EWAZEN
Organ Soloist: Hector Olivera

WORLD PREMIERE

Tod und Verklärung, Op. 24 RICHARD STRAUSS

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78, "Organ" CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS
Adagio — Allegro moderato —
Poco adagio
Allegro moderato — Presto — Allegro moderato —
Maestoso — Allegro
Organ Soloist: Hector Olivera