

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Karelia Overture, Op. 10 **(1893)**

JEAN SIBELIUS ■ 1865-1957

The strongly nationalistic citizens of Finland tried diligently to maintain their native customs, language and character during the Russian rule of their country by the Alexanders in the 19th century. In 1893, the Student Corporation of Viipuri University sponsored a benefit to support cultural education in Karelia, which, as the southeastern-most province of Finland, was the area where Russian influence was having the most immediate and decisive impact. The centerpiece of the event, given in Helsinki on November 13th, was a series of *tableaux-vivants*, living recreations of seven episodes and characters from Karelian history. The music to accompany the *tableaux* was commissioned from Jean Sibelius, who, at age 28, had recently established himself as the country's leading composer with his *Kullervo Symphony*. Sibelius, then ardently involved with the Finnish nationalist movement, was drawn to both the project and the cause, and he accepted the commission eagerly. (His most famous composition, *Finlandia*, originated in a similar historical pageant six years later.) He provided an overture, one song, and introductory and background music for the seven scenes of *Karelia*, which Harold E. Johnson described in his biography of the composer: "1. The interior of a Karelian house in the year 1293. A *runo* singer performs an ancient folk melody. News arrives that war has broken out. 2. Torkel Knutsson

is seen as the founder of Viipuri Castle. 3. The Lithuanian prince Narimont collects tribute from the Karelian people. 4. Karl Knutsson, surrounded by his courtiers in Viipuri Castle, listens to a ballad singer. 5. Pontus de la Gardie is seen as the conqueror and burner of Käkholm [Kexholm] in 1580. 6. The siege of Viipuri Castle in 1700. 7. Viipuri's union with greater Finland in 1811."

The patriotic entertainment closed with Sibelius' stirring arrangement of the Finnish national anthem, *Maamme laulu* ("Our Land") by Fredrik Pacius (1809-1891), one of the very few instances in which he quoted an existing vernacular melody in his music. Sibelius conducted, and he reported to his brother, Christian, that "there was such shouting [from the excited audience] that the music could hardly be heard." The composer conducted the complete score in concert six days later in Helsinki, but then remained uncertain about how to make further use of the music. It was not until 1896 that he decided to issue the Overture separately (as Op. 10) and rework three movements as a symphonic suite (Op. 11).

The Overture to *Karelia* is based on three themes: a noble opening strain in striding rhythms; a hymn-like melody of serious demeanor; and (after a recall of the opening strain) what Sibelius called the "march in the old style" that accompanied the third tableau. All three ideas are treated in the development section and returned in the recapitulation in condensed but intensified variants before the Overture reaches its stirring close.

Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129 (1850)

ROBERT SCHUMANN ■ 1810-1856

In September 1850, the Schumanns left Dresden to take up residence in Düsseldorf, where Robert assumed the post of municipal music director; he was welcomed to the city with a serenade, a concert of his works, a supper and a ball. Though he had been cautioned by his friend Felix Mendelssohn that the local musicians were a shoddy bunch, he was eager to take on the variety of duties that awaited him in the Rhenish city, including conducting the orchestra's subscription concerts, leading performances of church music, giving private music lessons, organizing a chamber music society and composing as time allowed. Mendelssohn's advice notwithstanding, Schumann found the players acceptable, and he plunged into his work with energy and enthusiasm. Surprisingly, this busy, new situation had a salutary effect on his composition, and within months he had composed the *Scenes from Goethe's "Faust"*, an Overture to Schiller's *The Bride of Messina*, many songs, the "Rhenish" Symphony (inspired by a trip upstream on September 29th to Cologne's awe-inspiring cathedral) and the lovely Cello Concerto.

Despite Schumann's promising entry into the musical life of Düsseldorf, it was not long before things turned sour. His fragile mental health, his ineptitude as a conductor and his frequent irritability created a rift with the musicians, and the orchestra's governing body presented him with the suggestion that, perhaps, his time would be better devoted entirely to composition. Schumann, increasingly unstable though at first determined to stay, complained to his wife, Clara, that

he was being cruelly treated. Proceedings were begun by the orchestra committee to relieve him of his position, but his resignation in 1853 ended the matter. By early the next year, Schumann's reason had completely given way. On February 27th, he tried to drown himself in the Rhine and a week later he was committed to the asylum in Eendenich, where he lingered with fleeting moments of sanity for nearly two-and-a-half years. His faithful Clara was there with him when he died on July 29, 1856, at the age of 46.

The Cello Concerto, a product of Schumann's first, happy months in Düsseldorf, was the result of a special affection he harbored for the instrument throughout his life. When a finger injury in 1832 ended his piano playing, he dabbled for a short time with the cello as a musical outlet. Though he never mastered the instrument, his familiarity with it is evident in this Concerto. Schumann directed that the Concerto's three movements be played without pause. The first two movements are expressive and largely contemplative, "exactly those qualities of the beloved enthusiastic dreamer whom we know as Schumann," wrote Sir Donald Tovey. The finale brings to the work a playful virtuosic verve to conclude the Concerto with a flurry of high spirits.

The composers have kindly provided the following biographical information and comments for their Variations on a Theme by Elgar.

YASH PAZHIANUR (b. 2004) is twelve years old and just finished seventh grade. He began piano lessons at age six at Canal Music Studios with Adrienne Walsh and now studies that instrument with Elisha Abas as well as composi-

tion and music theory with John Holly. Yash Pazhianur was recently admitted to the Juilliard Precollege Composition Program for 2016-2017.

“S.C., both the composition and the friend who inspired it, is strong, caring, loving, persistent, optimistic, strict, compassionate and occasionally explosive, with a hint of sadness.”

GRIFFIN WOODARD (b. 1998) attended Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts, where he majored in instrumental performance (guitar and clarinet) and studied with Greg Eicher, John Arnold, Mike Lorenz, David Macbeth and Matthew Wells. In his freshman year, he developed a passion for composition after hearing the music of Frank Zappa. He will be attending Oberlin Conservatory in the fall as a composition major. His life goal is to bring attention to social justice issues through music. Woodward’s *Fantasia and Fugue in C-sharp minor*, “Dedicated to Eric Garner” is his first effort in pursuit of that goal.

“M.E.V., my friend, is a very spirited conversationalist. He can deliver an impassioned speech on practically any topic — the genius of Mahler, the benefits of a vegetarian diet, the pitfalls of social justice, Schoenberg’s innovations, Coltrane’s spiritual evolution, and the principles of Nietzsche’s philosophy, all before breakfast. M.E.V. is also highly creative, a gifted musician and self-taught historian who frequently dives headfirst into things outside his principal interests, such as the cubist dance he created as a high school sophomore that reflected the work of Pablo Picasso. M.E.V.’s inexorably extroverted nature is matched by an inner seriousness of equal intensity. Underneath his energetic and often effusive countenance, there is a serious, shrewd, questioning musician

and world citizen. M.E.V. strongly embraces dissonance in all forms. If he were to embody a musical interval, it would probably be the minor ninth, arguably the most dissonant one of all. This is not because he is inherently dissonant; it is because he has a genuine penchant to create. He is chiefly concerned with attaining true musical self-expression. In short, M.E.V. is a unique individual with tremendous perspective and boundless creative depth.”

CHRISTOPHER LAZZARO (b. 1998), a composition student of Philadelphia composer Jan Krzywicki at Temple University, has played violin for nine years, piano for ten, and composed for eight. The first competition he won was the Young Composer Competition hosted by the Allentown Symphony in 2008.

“I.C.T. is a former friend of mine. She is an aspiring violinist, hence the solo in the opening/closing measures and first iteration of the theme. Brass and percussion are notable by their absence, as they don’t blend with the orchestra particularly well without interrupting the sensitivity that I associate with her temperament. She had a tendency to associate darkness with beauty, which I attempted to portray through the harmonic qualities and uncharacteristically low registers of the woodwinds. The brief ‘development’ is very exploratory (uncomfortable with original tonic) and unsettled, which captures her shyness and tentativeness. A few quotations hearken back to Medieval chants and refer to her devout Catholicism. Finally, she shared my fascination with ‘scenes,’ music that paints a vivid picture of a time or place. The lush strings that dominate this variation are my attempts at painting an untouched field she often told me she dreamed about.”

STEVE REISTETER (b. 1957) is a woodwind player, composer, arranger and member of the Allentown Band, Allentown Symphony and Hanover Woodwind Quintet. His published compositions and arrangements have been played worldwide by such ensembles as the Philadelphia Orchestra, Danish Concert Band, Amherst Saxophone Quartet and Michigan Philharmonic Orchestra. As a pop musician, he has played for such artists as Ella Fitzgerald, Bob Hope, Aretha Franklin, The Four Tops, The Temptations, Barbara Cook, Joel Grey, Bernadette Peters and Johnny Mathis, and been musical director/conductor for productions at the Civic Theatre of Allentown, including *Young Frankenstein*, *Follies*, *The Addams Family* and, most recently, *Carrie*. Steve Reisteter is an elementary general music teacher in the Whitehall-Coplay School District.

“R.K. & L.W. has a lot of fun energy, just like the real R.K. (ASO principal flutist Robin Kani). In the middle of the piece I wrote a duet for flute and trumpet because I thought it might be a real rarity for Robin to play a duet with her husband, Larry Wright (L.W.), during an orchestra concert.”

Variations on an Original Theme, “Enigma,” Op. 36 (1898-1899)

SIR EDWARD ELGAR ■ 1857-1934

Elgar’s “Enigma” Variations posits not just one puzzle, but three. First, each of the fourteen sections was headed with a set of initials or a nickname that stood for the name of the composer’s friend portrayed by that variation. The second mystery dealt with the theme itself, the section that bore the legend “Enigma.” It is believed that the theme represented Elgar himself (note the similarity of the opening phrase to the speech rhythm

of his name — Ed-ward EL-gar), thus making the variations upon it portraits of his friends as seen through his eyes. The final enigma, the one that neither Elgar offered to explain nor for which others have been able to find a definitive solution, arose from a statement of his: “Through the whole set another and larger theme ‘goes’ but is not played.... So the principal theme never appears.” Conjectures about this unplayed theme that fits each of the variations have ranged from *Auld Lang Syne* (which guess Elgar vehemently denied) to a phrase from Wagner’s *Parsifal*. One theory was published by the Dutch musicologist Theodore van Houten, who speculated that the phrase “never, never, never” from the grand old tune *Rule, Britannia* fits the requirements, and even satisfies some of the baffling clues that Elgar had spread to his friends. (“So the principal theme *never* appears.”) We shall never know for sure. Elgar took the solution to his grave.

Variation I (C.A.E.) is a tender depiction of the composer’s wife, Alice. Variation II (H.D. S.-P.) represents the warming-up finger exercises of H.D. Steuart-Powell, a piano-playing friend. Variation III (R.B.T.) utilizes the high and low woodwinds to portray the distinctive voice of Richard Baxter Townsend, an amateur actor with an unusually wide vocal range. Variation IV (W.M.B.) suggests the considerable energy of William Meath Baker. Variation V (R.P.A.) reflects the frequently changing moods of Richard Penrose Arnold, son of the poet Matthew Arnold. Variation VI (Yso-bel) gives prominence to the viola, the instrument played by Elgar’s pupil Isobel Fitton. Variation VII (Troyte) describes the high spirits of Arthur Troyte Griffith. Variation VIII (W.N.) denotes the grace

of Miss Winifred Norbury. Variation IX (Nimrod) is a moving testimonial to A.J. Jaeger, Elgar's publisher and close friend. Variation X (Dorabella): Intermezzo describes Dora Penny, a friend of hesitant conversation and fluttering manner. Variation XI (G.R.S.) portrays the organist George R. Sinclair and his bulldog, Dan, out for a walk by the River Wye. Variation XII (B.G.N.) honors the cellist Basil G. Nevinson. Variation XIII (** *): Romanza was written while Lady Mary Lygon was on a sea journey. The solo clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage Overture* and the hollow sound of the timpani played with wooden sticks suggests the distant rumble of ship's engines. Variation XIV (E.D.U.): Finale, Elgar's self-portrait, recalls the music of earlier variations.

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ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

NOVEMBER 5 AND 6, 2016
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Karelia Overture, Op. 10

JEAN SIBELIUS

Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Nicht zu schnell

Langsam

Sehr lebhaft

Played without pause

Cello Soloist: Alexander Hersh

Schadt String Competition Winner

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY ELGAR

by the winners of the Allentown Symphony Orchestra's

2016 Elgar Composer Competition

S.C.

YASH PAZHIANUR

M.E.V.

GRIFFIN WOODARD

I.C.T.

CHRISTOPHER LAZZARO

R.K. & L.W.

STEVE REISTETER

WORLD PREMIERES

?? INTERMISSION ??

Variations on an Original Theme, "Enigma," Op. 36

EDWARD ELGAR

Enigma: Andante

Variation I (C.A.E.) — Variation II (H.D. S.-P.) — Variation III (R.B.T.) —

Variation IV (W.M.B.) — Variation V (R.P.A.) — Variation VI (Ysobel) —

Variation VII (Troyte) — Variation VIII (W.N.) — Variation IX (Nimrod) —

Variation X (Dorabella): Intermezzo — Variation XI (G.R.S.) —

Variation XII (B.G.N.) — Variation XIII (* * *): Romanza —

Variation XIV (E.D.U.): Finale