

The Allentown Symphony plays Petrushka and other music based on Stories

by Diane Wittry

In all cultures and throughout all of history, storytelling has played an important role in igniting our imaginations and in preserving stories for future generations to remember.

Composers like Rossini, Richard Strauss, and Igor Stravinsky were all experts in bringing a story to life through music, and we will bring their music to life as I conduct a performance of music based upon stories with the Allentown Symphony Orchestra on Saturday, March 12, 7:30pm and Sunday, March 13, 3:00pm at Miller Symphony Hall in downtown Allentown.

Some stories are fully fantasy and involve mystical characters. These are often called Fairy Tales. Other stories are actually based on real events, although the reality of the details may have been greatly expanded as the story evolved through many generations.

One of the true stories that we will feature is the famous "William Tell" story from 15th century Switzerland, which Gioacchino Rossini used as the basis for his opera of the same title. The end of the William Tell Overture is perhaps some of the most popular and well recognized music of all time, being that it was the music used as the theme for the TV show the "Lone Ranger."

The William Tell overture opens with the Cellos and Basses announcing the sun rising over the lake. Then we hear rain drops and a violent storm, followed by the beautiful English Horn solo playing a tune associated with the Alpine horn that cow herders used to call in the cattle. Finally the famous Trumpet call, and the rousing galloping music that makes us want to shout "Hi ho, Silver!"

The second piece on the concert is from a story about an impish prankster named "Till Eulenspiegel" that originated in German folklore. The real man named Till Eulenspiegel is said to have been born in Brunswick in the early 1300's. His tales were told in popular books over the centuries that narrated all of his escapades.

In the piece "Til Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks", by Rickard Strauss, Till gets into all different types of trouble. He destroys the carts in the market place, flirts with the young girls, makes fun of the university scholars, dresses up like a monk, and eventually gets arrested and sentenced to death for blasphemy. All of this is told humorously through the music.

The final story on the program is from a 17th century Russian folk tale about a puppet called "Petrushka." Traditionally Petrushka was a jester dressed in red, and he often had a long nose.

In the ballet "Petrushka" by Stravinsky, our puppet character falls in love with a beautiful Ballerina, only to be left devastated as the Ballerina falls in love with the powerful Moor.

In the end, the Moor kills Petrushka, and we are left wondering if Petrushka was really ever alive, or was he just a stuffed puppet?

Joining the Allentown Symphony Orchestra for this exciting performance of Petrushka will be members of the The Ballet Guild of the Lehigh Valley and Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, Artistic Director, Karen Kroninger Knerr.

We will be featuring Jesse Sani dancing the part of Petrushka. Jesse was born and raised in Nazareth, PA, and attended the Lehigh Valley Charter School for the Performing Arts in Bethlehem. He has been performing recently with dance companies in Miami, Philadelphia, and New York.

The part of the Ballerina will be danced on Saturday by Corinne Walden, a native of Bethlehem, PA, and on Sunday by Jillian Sinko, a student at Saucon Valley High School.

The Moor will be danced by Maleek Washington, who has performed extensively with companies in Europe and the United States. He is currently on the faculty of the Joffrey Ballet School in New York.

It is a rare opportunity to hear Stravinsky's Petrushka performed by a full symphony orchestra combined with ballet dancers and lighting. Add to that two other exciting story pieces by Rossini and Richard Strauss performed by a professional symphony orchestra of over 75 members and you have a spectacular evening of music.