The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra

William Schrickel, Music Director

Sunday, November 23, 2014—4:00 PM

St. Philip the Deacon Lutheran Church, Plymouth, Minnesota

William Schrickel, conductor

Kevin Kling, author and narrator

Tom Klein, uilleann pipes

Linh Kauffman, soprano

Program

Percy Grainger (arranger) *Irish Tune from County Derry (Danny Boy)*

Kevin Kling/

 Victor Zupanc *The Burning Wisdom of Finn McCool*

 *Kevin Kling, narrator;*

*Tom Klein, uilleann pipes*

Intermission

Gustav Mahler Symphony #4 in G Major

 I. Deliberate. Not Hurried

 II. In easy motion. Without haste

 III. Serene

 IV. Very leisurely

 *Linh Kauffman, soprano*

 *(The 3rd & 4th movements are played without pause.)*

Program Notes

Percy Grainger (1882-1861), the only child of British-born architect John Grainger and his Australian wife, Rose Aldridge, was born in Brighton, Victoria, a Melbourne suburb, and was a child prodigy on the piano. At the age of 12, he moved to Frankfurt, Germany to study at the Hoch Conservatory, later living in London from 1901-1914 where he became well known as a performer, composer and collector and publisher of English folk music. In 1914 he moved to the USA, where he lived for the rest of his life, taking US citizenship in 1918.

*Irish Tune from County Derry* (or *Londonderry Air*), a folk tune from Northern Ireland, was initially collected and transcribed by Jane Ross and published in an 1855 book, *The Ancient Music of Ireland*. Percy Grainger arranged the tune for string orchestra in 1905. Frederick Weatherly, a British lawyer and lyricist, originally wrote the words of *Danny Boy* to an unrelated song in 1910, but after his sister sent him the sheet music of *Londonderry Air* in 1913, Weatherly revised his lyric to fit the traditional melody. Following is Weatherly’s original text:

Oh, Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling

From glen to glen, and down the mountain side,

The summer's gone, and all the flowers dying,

tis you, tis you must go and I must bide.

But come ye back when summer's in the meadow,

Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow,

'Tis I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow,

Oh, Danny Boy, oh Danny Boy, I love you so!

But when you come, and all the flowers are dying,

and If I'm dead, as dead I well may be,

You come and find the place where I am lying,

And kneel and say an [Ave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hail_Mary) there for me;

And I shall hear, though soft you tread above me,

And all my grave will warmer, sweeter be,

For you will bend and tell me that you love me,

And I shall sleep in peace until you come to me!

Victor Zupanc was born in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, and began his musical studies at the age of six at Victoria’s Royal Conservatory of Music. He earned college degrees from the University of Victoria and the University of California at San Diego. He has conducted, performed in and composed scores for more than 300 plays produced around the world, and he has been the resident Music Director/Composer at the Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis since 1989. He composed *The Burning Wisdom of Finn McCool* in 2013, and he wrote the following note about the work:

When I was presented with the opportunity to compose a new orchestral piece in collaboration with my old friend Kevin Kling, I, of course, jumped at the opportunity. I was doubly excited when Kevin suggested an old Irish story. I love the Celtic culture and this piece gave me an opportunity to explore the beautiful, haunting melodies of traditional Celtic music. This composition is full of surprises, and so the listener will, at times, hear music that is reminiscent of Danny Elfman’s circus-like film scores. In other sections there is a meditative minimalism that suggests the music of Arvo Pärt, and then it launches into driving rhythms influenced by the rock music of Peter Gabriel. I gave myself no limitations regarding the musical styles of this piece. The only rules that I followed were that I would have fun writing it and that the composition would be full of surprises to keep the audience engaged. My main objective was to compose music that would help illustrate Kevin’s wonderful story, which is filled with magic, mystery, leprechauns and great battles.

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) began to write songs incorporating texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy’s Magic Horn) in 1888 shortly after finishing work on his Symphony #1 in D major. *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* is a collection of German folk poetry that was compiled, edited and modified by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Armin at the turn of the 19th century. Mahler composed his song *The Heavenly Life* in 1892, using a *Wunderhorn* poetic text that describes a child’s idea of how life will be in heaven. Nine years later, Mahler completed his Symphony #4, a work that features a setting for solo soprano of *The Heavenly Life* as its finale and incorporates myriad musical elements of the song in the preceding movements.

The symphony opens with the sound of sleigh bells and chirping flutes, a cheerfully light-hearted idea that will recur several times in the initial movement and will tellingly reappear in the finale. The first violins softly sing a sweet, naïve-sounding melody in G major that will be refined, reworked and recapitulated throughout the ensuing seventeen minutes, along with a complementary jovial ascending figure in the lower strings. A second theme emerges in the celli, yearning and lyrical, before Mahler undertakes the brilliant development of his ideas. Then, unexpectedly, he introduces an entirely new melodic idea: a simple tune, played *forte* in the four flutes and answered in the bass clarinet, that will only reveal its ultimate structural importance much later, at the climax of the symphony’s third movement. While the Fourth Symphony has a reputation for being Mahler’s happiest and sunniest work, there are threatening, dark shadows that emerge from the composer’s developmental thematic manipulations, only to disappear in what is arguably the most wry and insouciant recapitulation in the entire symphonic repertoire.

Mahler composed a dark, grotesque scherzo with two contrastingly beautiful and sweet trios for his second movement. He subtitled the movement *Death Strikes Up*, and the music requires that the concertmaster perform a number of solos on a “mistuned” instrument on which all four strings are cranked a step higher than normal to give the instrument a piercing, aggressive, strident tone. Mahler’s wife, Alma, commented that the movement was inspired by the self-portrait created by the Swiss Symbolist artist Arnold Böcklin in which the skeletal figure of Death saws away on a fiddle next to the ear of the mesmerized painter. (Böcklin’s ghostly paintings of *The Isle of the Dead* inspired Rachmaninoff to create his symphonic tone poem of the same name.)

For the slow third movement, Mahler composed a set of variations on an exquisite, beautifully serene and ruminative theme in G major. Mahler told conductor Bruno Walter that while writing this movement, he’d had a vision of “one of those church sepulchers showing a recumbent stone image of the deceased with the arms crossed in eternal sleep.” The stillness of the main theme is interrupted several times by a second theme that invokes a quality of nearly unbearable lamentation. Mahler allows subsequent variations to gather more light, energy and speed, until the opening mood suddenly reasserts its massive gravity. The music fades away until all forward motion seems to stop—the movement is going to end in the same G major stillness with which it opened. Then, like a musical lightning bolt, the stillness is shattered in a blinding flash of E major. The clouds part, the skies open up, and the heavens are ecstatically revealed in all their unimaginably spectacular glory. That simple sounding “new” third theme played by the four flutes back in the first movement shows itself to be in fact the Music of the Divine! The gates of heaven have been opened, the mystery has been unveiled, and with hushed expectation, the finale is ushered in.

Mahler wrote that in his finale, the soprano should sing the words to *The Heavenly Life* with absolutely no trace of irony. It is telling that much of the child’s description of heaven revolves around the abundance of food. Yes, there is peace and dancing, but most of all there is bread, and vegetables, and lamb, and ox, and venison, and rabbit, and wine. The sound of the chirping winds and sleigh bells returns, tying the finale back to the opening movement, linking heaven to earth. The assorted patron saints perform their food-related chores. Finally, after everyone had had as much to drink and eat as thy want, it is time to listen to the music. The final verse tells the real story: no music ever heard on earth can compare with the music of heaven. Mahler closes his symphony in a quiet, gentle, E major, the double basses holding their final low E for the duration of eternity.

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