

The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra
William Schrickel, Music Director

Sunday, October 14, 2018—4:00 PM
Saint Andrew's Lutheran Church, Mahtomedi, Minnesota

William Schrickel, conductor
Dominick Argento, MSO Composer Laureate

Program

Giaochino Rossini Overture to *Il Signor Bruschino*

Dominick Argento *A Ring of Time*
(Preludes and Pageants for Orchestra and Bells)

- I. Dawn–Spring (Parade)
- II. Noon–Summer (Procession)
- III. Twilight–Fall (March)
- IV. Midnight–Winter (Cortege)
- V. Postlude

The third, fourth, and fifth movements are played without a pause.

Intermission

Béla Bartók Suite from *The Wooden Prince*, Op. 13

- I. *Prelude*
- II. *The Princess*
- III. *The Forest*
- IV. *The Prince's Work Song*
- V. *The Brook*
- VI. *Dance of the Wooden Prince*
- VII. *Postlude*

The seven sections are played without a pause.

Program Notes

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) composed his first opera, *Demetrio e Polibio*, when he was sixteen years old, and went on to write a total of thirty-nine operas before his fortieth birthday. Though he lived to be seventy-six, he never penned another opera after *William Tell* premiered at the Paris Opera in 1829. In 1812, Rossini composed *Il Signor Bruschino*, a one-act *farsa* based on French playwright René de Chazet's *The Accidental Son*. The charming, energetic overture is perhaps most notable for incorporating the first use by an orchestral composer of what is now termed an "extended instrumental technique" — at several spots in the work, the second violinists are required to tap their bows on their music stands, an effect that must have stunned the audience at the premiere at Venice's Teatro San Moisè.

Dominick Argento (b. 1927) is the Composer Laureate of the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra and this afternoon's performance celebrates his upcoming ninety-first birthday on October 27. He lives in Minneapolis and taught composition at the University of Minnesota for 40 years. Argento was the first recipient of the McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, given in recognition of his lifelong contribution to the arts in Minnesota. He won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1975 for *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, a song cycle written for Dame Janet Baker, and he received a Grammy Award in 2004 for *Casa Guidi*. Argento's *Ode to the West Wind* was given its first public performance by soprano Maria Jette and the MSO under William Schrickel's direction in October of 2014.

Argento's *A Ring of Time* was commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra to celebrate the ensemble's seventieth anniversary in the 1972-73 season. The composer, who will discuss the work prior to the performance, wrote the following note about the *A Ring of Time*:

This music celebrates an anniversary of the Minnesota Orchestra and, like anniversaries, deals with the idea of recurrence and the passage of time. 'Recurrence' types of music are used almost exclusively: imitation, canon, fugue, ground bass, chaconne, rondeau, etc. On one level the title of the work, *A Ring of Time*, refers to the predominant role assigned to the bells—three sets of chimes encircle the orchestra—those aural signals of time's passing. (It should also be mentioned that the work was wholly composed in Florence where the hourly ringing of church bells is inescapable.) And a seventieth

anniversary brought to mind the biblical lifespan of man: threescore and ten—on another level, our own ring of time.

The subtitle of the piece is *Preludes and Pageants for Orchestra and Bells*, although the form actually resembles the traditional symphony: the first pageant—a holiday parade—an exuberant opening movement; the second pageant—a wedding procession—a slow movement; the third pageant—a war march—a grotesque scherzo; and the fourth—a funeral procession—the finale. They symbolize, of course, youth, love, struggle, and death—the passage of a lifetime. Each of these four pageants is preceded by a short prelude, entitled Dawn, Noon, Twilight, and Midnight respectively—the passage of a day. Finally, each pairing of prelude and pageant is identified with a season: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter—the passage of a year.

There is a postlude for strings and harp alone that is not part of this ring of days and years but rather is intended to suggest the possibility of time transcended, a reverberation that lingers after time's final toll.

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) composed *The Wooden Prince* between 1914 and 1916. The ballet's plot is derived from a fairy tale created by playwright Béla Balázs, a fellow Hungarian who was the librettist of Bartók's earlier opera, *Bluebeard's Castle*. Taken at face value, the fairy tale is a generic take on the familiar story of "the handsome prince who overcomes obstacles to win the love of the beautiful princess so they can live happily-ever-after." But on a deeper, darker, psychological level, *The Wooden Prince* explores themes that were near and dear to both Bartók and Balázs—the fundamental power and transcendent beauty of Nature, and the desire of a creative artist to be loved for who they are and not simply for what they create. *The Wooden Prince* was a tremendous success when it was premiered at the Budapest Opera on May 12, 1917—the repeated ovations and curtain calls represented the greatest musical triumph of the 36-year-old composer's life.

The suite from *The Wooden Prince*, drawn from Bartók's 55-minute-long ballet, comprises seven uninterrupted sections and about half of the music of the full-length score, and the order of the sections more or less reflects the story line. (Inexplicably, the suite's third and fourth sections, *The Prince's Work Song* and *The Brook*, are presented in the inverse order of their appearance in the ballet.) The following is a synopsis of the dance's action:

The *Prelude* (played by the orchestra in the dark before the curtain rises) is designed to lead the listener's imagination into the fantasy world of the fairy tale. (The first four minutes of music are played over a sustained pedal tone of C, a musical construction that demonstrates Bartók's emulation of the music of Wagner, who opens *Das Rheingold* with nearly five minutes of music built on a pedal E-flat to establish his own mythological setting.) The curtain rises to reveal the separate palaces of the Prince and Princess, separated by a forest of trees and a brook. In the foreground, a Fairy stands at the foot of a hill, overseeing the entire scene. The Princess appears in the forest, dancing happily by herself, completely self-possessed (*The Princess*). The Fairy disappears as the Princess starts to return to her castle. Just as The Princess is about to enter her home, the Prince catches sight of her, and he is immediately love-struck. The Princess enters a room in her palace and sits down to work at her spinning wheel, and the Prince decides to go to meet her.

As the Prince enters the forest on his way to the Princess' castle, the Fairy casts a spell and brings all the trees to life, and the Prince is forced to fight his way through the terrifying woods (*The Forest*). Finally vanquishing the trees, the Prince is then beset by rising waters, directed by the Fairy, that block his access to the Princess (*The Brook*). Unable to make his way through the raging torrents, the Prince returns to the forest to plan his next move while the Princess, oblivious to the Prince or any of his attempts to make his way to her palace, sits spinning at her wheel. In despair, the Prince comes up with a plan to get the Princess' attention, and slips first his cloak and then his crown over his walking staff, waving it over the trees to get the woman's attention. The Princess pays no heed. In a state of anguish, the Prince cuts off all of his long blond hair and fastens it onto the staff. *Success!* The Princess races out of her palace to see the "new toy" up close. The Prince shows himself to the Princess, but she has no interest in him — she only wants the puppet. The Fairy decides to enter into the game by bringing the puppet—*The Wooden Prince*—to life. The Princess only has eyes for the Wooden Prince, and she steals the puppet from the Prince and begins a long dance with the toy (*Dance of the Wooden Prince*).

Left in anguish, the Prince collapses in grief. The Fairy takes pity on the Prince, comforting him by enchanting all the flowers in the woods and creating from them a new cloak, a new crown and new golden curls for the Prince. All of Nature—the trees, the waters, the flowers—pay homage to the solitary Prince as the Fairy leads him to the top of the hill: "Here you will be king over everything," the Fairy tells him. (This is the musical and dramatic climax of the ballet.)

The Princess returns to the scene with the Wooden Prince, but everything about the puppet is now in disarray. Angrily, she tries to make the doll dance, but everything she does only makes the Wooden Prince break down further, and the Princess starts to hate the puppet. As she tosses the doll aside, she suddenly sees the Prince in all his radiant splendor. She tries everything possible to get the Prince to dance with her. But, her previous rejection of him still fresh in his mind, he rebuffs her and turns away. She chases after him, but the trees in the forest block her way. She stumbles over the broken Wooden Prince, and she kicks the puppet in uncontrollable frustration. In complete despair, the Princess throws her crown away, tears off her cloak, and cuts off all of her own hair. She collapses to the ground, burying her face in her hands.

The Prince returns to see that the Princess has completely broken down. Touched by her pain, the Prince consoles her. She is ashamed of her bareness, but he continues to hold her tenderly. They kiss, and as they continue their long embrace, all of the enchanted objects around them slowly return to their ordinary shapes and appearances, and the curtain falls (*Postlude*).

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