

THE BARD COLLEGE CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

CONSERVATORY SUNDAYS

Bard College Conservatory Orchestra

Sunday, November 10, 2013 | 3 p.m.



THE BARD COLLEGE CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

Robert Martin, Director

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PROGRAM

Overture to <i>Guillaume Tell</i> (William Tell)	Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)
<i>Siegfried's Funeral March</i> from <i>Götterdämmerung</i>	Richard Wagner (1813–33)
<i>Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche</i> , Op.28	Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

INTERMISSION

Symphony 15 in A Major, Op. 141 Allegretto Adagio - Lento - Adagio Allegretto Adagio - Allegretto	Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75)
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The Bard College Conservatory Orchestra
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Erica Kiesewetter, *Director of Orchestral Studies*

VIOLIN I

Fang Xi Liu, *coconcertmaster*
Dongfang Ouyang, *co-concertmaster*

Zhi Ma
Scot Moore
Gabriel Baeza
Jiazhi Wang
Aischa Guendisch
Xianbo Wen
Tianpei Ai
Reina Murooka
Matthew Woodard
Qun Dai
Caitlin Majewski

VIOLIN II

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Fang Xi Liu, *coprincipal*
Jiayu Sun
Sabrina Tabby
Hanni Xie
Veronika Mojžešová
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Shuang Yang

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Wenlong Huang
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BIOGRAPHY

Widely recognized for his conducting but also for his visionary zeal, championing masterpieces unfairly ignored by history and putting together concert programs that engage the head as well as the heart, **Leon Botstein** recently celebrated his 20th year as music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra. He is also artistic codirector of the SummerScape and Bard Music festivals, which take place at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, designed by Frank Gehry for Bard College, where Botstein has been president since 1975. He is conductor laureate of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2003–11.

Botstein leads an active schedule as a guest conductor all over the world, and can be heard on numerous recordings with the London Symphony (their recording of Popov's First Symphony was nominated for a Grammy), the London Philharmonic, NDR-Hamburg, and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. Many of his live performances with the American Symphony Orchestra are available for download online. *The Los Angeles Times* called this summer's Los Angeles Philharmonic performance under Leon Botstein "the all-around most compelling performance of anything I've heard all summer at the Bowl."

Highly regarded as a music historian, Botstein is the editor of *The Musical Quarterly* and the author of numerous articles and books. In 2011 he was invited to give the prestigious Tanner Lectures in Berkeley, California. For his contributions to music he has received the award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Harvard University's esteemed Centennial Award, as well as the Cross of Honor, First Class, from the government of Austria. In 2009 he received Carnegie Foundation's Academic Leadership Award, and in 2011 was inducted into the American Philosophical Society. He is also the 2012 recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award for the Elevation of Music in Society. In 2013, following in the footsteps of Sir John Barbirolli, Otto Klemperer, and many other of his musical heroes, Leon Botstein received the Bruckner Society's Julio Kilenyi Medal of Honor for his interpretations of that composer's music.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Overture to *Guillaume Tell* (William Tell)

Composed in 1829

Gioachino Rossini

Born in Pesaro, February 29, 1792

Died in Paris, November 13, 1868

Gioachino Rossini was not only a brilliant composer, but also a shrewd one. He knew what worked and once he had perfected a formula—be it how to write an overture, mold an aria, or craft a finale—he tended to stick to it for some time. The lilting melodies, infectious rhythms, and bubbling crescendos found in most of his overtures were widely admired and imitated. By the 1820s he was the most popular composer in Europe. Today he is most remembered for his sparkling comic operas, but for various reasons (including marrying a celebrated singer who desired more serious fare), he concentrated on writing dramatic operas for about the last 10 years of his career, beginning in 1817.

For his last opera, *William Tell*, composed for the Paris Opéra and premiered in 1829, Rossini based his libretto on Friedrich von Schiller's play *Wilhelm Tell* (1804), which tells a story of Swiss patriots struggling against Austrian imperial dominance in the 13th century. Although it is not clear whether Rossini intended this long and demanding work to be his final opera—audience tastes were changing—it does synthesize many elements of his style. After the premiere Rossini in essence retired, at the height of his fame and at the age of 37. (Born on leap-year day in 1792, Rossini had, however, celebrated only nine birthdays.) He lived a rich and famous man for nearly 40 more years (and had nine more birthdays.)

The music of *William Tell*, an opera in four acts that lasts some four hours, manifests a depth and seriousness that contrasts with the composer's comic successes, such as *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813) and *The Barber of Seville* (1816). Likewise, the Overture to this opera is unique, functioning programmatically in a manner that previous examples had done only obliquely. Rossini's overtures often have no musical connection to the opera that follows (one reason is that he freely reused earlier ones for new operas), but in this case the Overture both sets the mood and prefigures musical content.

Structured in four independent sections, it proves a remarkably effective concertpiece. The intimate chamber-like opening, for five cellos, sets the scene of pastoral quietude that is the backdrop of the opera. A nervous transitional passage leads to the second section, a striking re-creation of the terror and chaos of a sudden storm. In the third section, a English horn solo is meant to evoke the shepherd's *ranz des vaches*. The fourth section is the best known, featuring the rousing trumpet gallop finale that would become such a familiar part of popular culture in the 20th century, most notably from its use in the TV western *The Lone Ranger*.

Siegfried's Funeral March from Götterdämmerung

Composed in 1869–74

Richard Wagner

Born in Leipzig, May 22, 1813

Died in Venice, February 13, 1883

When it came to writing the *Ring*, one of the most awesome conceptions in the history of the arts, Wagner went about it backwards. He initially devised the libretto for an opera called *Siegfried's Tod* (Siegfried's Death) in 1848, but decided that it needed to be prefaced by an account of earlier events in the hero Siegfried's life. So to precede *Siegfried's Tod*, which he eventually renamed *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods), he wrote the libretto for *Der junge Siegfried* (Young Siegfried; later just *Siegfried*). Yet once again he felt that audiences deserved more of the mythic history of this German hero and his ancestry and therefore wrote *Die Walküre* (The Valkyrie), which explained the circumstances of Siegfried's conception by the brother and sister Siegmund and Sieglinde. The libretto for a unified trilogy now complete, Wagner decided to append an extended prologue in one act (nearly two-and-a-half hours long) called *Das Rheingold* (The Rhine Gold), which would provide the foundation for the entire story by telling about the gods and goddesses of Valhalla.

Once the text was finished and published in 1853 Wagner began writing the music for the four

operas, which would take the next 20 years of his life. (In 1856 he interrupted the third opera, *Siegfried*, to compose *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger*.)

The ultimate result is a miraculously unified work lasting some 15 hours and written over a period of nearly 25 years. One is hard pressed to think of many other artistic projects of such scope, scale, and ambition.

Götterdämmerung is thus an opera conceived of by a 35-year-old, with much of the text written at that time, but with the music composed by a mature master of 60. (Wagner would only write one more opera, *Parsifal*.) This culminating opera of the *Ring* contains extended orchestral sections that are often performed in concert settings, which underscores the orchestral and ultimately symphonic nature of Wagner's musical accomplishment. He may not have written symphonies as Beethoven did, but he nonetheless in certain respects created something similar. *Siegfried's Funeral March* occurs in the third act after the hero has been killed. The march employs a striking motive of death—two loud chords followed by a slithering melody up and down in the lower strings—as well as other motives that provide a “review” of the hero's life.

Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op.28

Composed in 1894-95

Richard Strauss

Born in Munich, June 11, 1864

Died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, September 8, 1949

Like most young composers honing their art, Richard Strauss began his long career writing relatively conventional music. Raised in a musical household—his father played principal French horn in the Munich Court Orchestra—Strauss's early compositions were firmly anchored in traditional forms. Within the fraught musical politics of the time the allegiances of the Strauss family were clear, as was the enemy: the program music of the New German School, epitomized by Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner.

Then came his “conversion,” as Strauss would later call it. The composer and musician Alexander Ritter, 31 years Strauss's senior and someone who had known both Liszt and Wagner, became like a second father, as well as an artistic mentor. Strauss turned to the Lisztian domain of the “Symphonic Poem,” or what he would call “Tone Poems.” In certain respects these program works, usually in one extended orchestral movement, are descendants of the concert overtures of Beethoven and Mendelssohn. The common starting point is an extra-musical source—a poem, novel, play, legend, historical event, natural phenomenon, philosophical idea, or some other inspiration—that is used as the basis for musical illustration or reflection.

Strauss cautiously moved in the direction of program music with a four-movement descriptive symphony called *Aus Italien* (Out of Italy; 1886). For his first tone poem, the 23-year-old composer turned to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, followed by *Don Juan* (1887) and *Death and Transfiguration* (1889). With these works he had found his mature voice and they marked an important stage in early musical Modernism.

Strauss turned his attention next to opera, writing the neo-Wagnerian *Guntram*, which bombed badly at its premiere in May 1894. This may have dissuaded him from continuing work on another dramatic project for which he had been writing a libretto, namely a “folk opera” about the popular 14th-century character Till Eulenspiegel. “I have already put together a very nice scenario,” Strauss wrote in a letter, “although the figure of Master Till Eulenspiegel does not quite appear before my eyes. The book of folk tales outlines only a rogue, with too superficial a dramatic personality. The developing of his character along lines more profound than his trait of contempt for humanity also presents considerable difficulties.” Strauss decided instead to use the character for his fourth tone poem, probably begun sometime in 1894 and finished in May of the next year. Franz Wüllner conducted the premiere in Cologne in November 1895. The work immediately became a popular favorite, displaying a humorous side of the composer not always apparent in his other orchestral works.

Strauss was reluctant to spell out the program in detail—he wrote a brief telegram to Wüllner, who had asked for background about the piece: “Analysis impossible for me. All wit spent in notes.” But over time he divulged more information, identifying two prominent themes associated with the title character “that run through the whole piece in the most varied disguises and moods and situations until the catastrophe where he is hanged after the death sentence has been spoken over him.” The full title of the work is *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks, After the Old Rogue's Tale, Set in Rondeau*

Form for Large Orchestra. Strauss compared his use of rondo form here with the finale of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony.

The opening two ideas come in parts—first a lilting string theme that Strauss said was meant to convey “Once upon a time there was a roguish jester,” followed by a horn solo, one of the most famous themes in all orchestral music, that identifies the prankster “whose name was Till Eulenspiegel.” A third theme associated with Till is mockingly put forth by the clarinet (“He is a wicked goblin.”) Till goes through various adventures, some of which Strauss specifically identified: He rides on horseback through a market crowded with women (represented by clarinets sweeping up); disguises himself as a minister and “oozes unction and morality,” but because of his mockery “feels a sudden horror of his end.” The gallant hero comes across a group of pretty girls and woos them (with a lilting version of the initial horn call); he debates with pompous philistine philosophers (four bassoons and bass clarinet). At the climax of the piece he is put on trial—the death sentence is pronounced, he “nonchalantly whistles” (the clarinet theme again), and is executed. The opening “once upon a time” music returns to conclude this “old rogue’s tale.”

Symphony No. 15 In A Major, Op. 141

Composed in 1971

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born in St. Petersburg, September 25, 1906

Died in Moscow, August 9, 1975

The great Russian cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich characterized the 15 symphonies of his friend Dmitri Shostakovich as “a secret history of Russia.” What Shostakovich wrote as a precocious teenager grew out of an almost entirely different world than the one he inhabited at the end of his life, when he composed his final symphony, which we hear today. The genuine optimism after the 1917 Revolution had passed through the horrific realities under Stalin to the stagnation and dreariness of the Brezhnev era.

Shostakovich's dazzling First Symphony, premiered in 1926 when the composer was just 19, made him famous, extending his renown far beyond the Soviet Union as Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Arturo Toscanini, and other leading conductors championed the youthful work. He titled his Second Symphony “To October—A Symphonic Dedication” and included a chorus praising the Revolution and Lenin. The Third Symphony, “The First of May,” was another political testimony with chorus. By the time of his Fourth, in 1936, the 29-year-old composer had run into serious difficulties with the Soviet government. Stalin's displeasure at his opera *Lady Macbeth of the District of Mtsensk* resulted in a scathing editorial in the official newspaper *Prawda*. Shostakovich was forced to withdraw the Symphony, a grand Mahlerian work that waited 25 years for its premiere, once Stalin had safely been buried.

The popular Fifth Symphony officially redeemed Shostakovich in 1937 and became his most popular work, an instant “classic.” And although the Sixth (1939) did not fare quite as well, the Seventh (“Leningrad”), written during the war and performed to great acclaim in Russia and in the West in 1942, secured his position at the leading Soviet composer. It landed Shostakovich on the cover of *Time*. Expectations were great about what he would do next but the Eighth (1943) generally disappointed in its pessimistic tone. Worse, the Ninth, composed as the German defeat was imminent in 1945 and Russian victory to be celebrated, proved a modestly witty affair. The composer was smacked down again by government officials in 1948 and did not write a symphony again until his Tenth in 1953, just after Stalin's death. It was followed by three with programmatic titles: “The Year 1905,” “The Year 1917,” and “Babi Yar.” With Shostakovich's health declining, the searing Fourteenth Symphony from 1969 is a song cycle set to death-haunted poems.

Death haunts the other great last works that followed: the Symphony we hear today, the Suite on texts by Michelangelo, the late string quartets, and the final Viola Sonata. As with Mahler's last works, Shostakovich displays a variety of responses to the approach of death. While the Fourteenth Symphony, for example, confronted it with anger, the Fifteenth mixes youthful energy with wise serenity. Shostakovich composed this final symphony in the summer of 1971. After four that either featured programs or texts, he returned to the more abstract presentation of the Tenth, composed some 18 years earlier. Work on the Fifteenth Symphony proceeded quickly, although sometimes painfully, and it was finished by the end of July. In September Shostakovich celebrated his 65th birthday and a few weeks later survived a second heart attack. Illness delayed the premiere of the

Symphony, the first one that he entrusted to his son, Maxim, who conducted the Symphony Orchestra of All-Union Radio and Television at the Moscow Conservatory in January 1972.

Many of Shostakovich's symphonies—some argue most or all of them—seem to carry hidden meanings and messages that either have deeply personal resonances or that run counter to their announced intention. Is the Eleventh Symphony really about the “Bloody Sunday” in 1905, when the Tsar's Imperial Guard opened fire on a peaceful gathering in front of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, or rather about the later Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising that occurred the year before Shostakovich wrote the work in 1957? The abstract nature of instrumental music allows listeners to come up with their own answers and therefore proved a realm of freedom in the repressive Soviet Union. Although Shostakovich did not give a title to the Fifteenth Symphony, or include a sung text, he inserted a wide range of musical quotations that are immediately suggestive, most obviously Rossini's *William Tell* Overture in the first movement and the “fate” motive from Wagner's *Ring* cycle in the fourth movement. (A quotation from Glinka's song “Do not tempt me needlessly” in the finale will probably be less noticeable for Western audiences.) There are also allusions to some of his own earlier compositions, such as the percussion interlude in the opera *The Nose* and the simultaneous juxtaposition of different meters in the Second Symphony.

The appearances of the *William Tell* Overture in the first movement (Allegretto) are so striking that one inevitably asks why Shostakovich inserted such a well-known piece. The composer himself divulged little, except that the first movement “describes childhood—just a toyshop, with a cloudless sky above.” Indeed, there is a largely playful tone to the movement, although the eminent German conductor Kurt Sanderling recalled sitting with the composer at the Berlin premiere and remarking that, unlike most of the audience, he found the first movement tragic. He recalled that Shostakovich replied, “You are not wrong. It is tragic, marionette-like: We are all marionettes.” There is, in any case, a stark contrast in moods over the course of the Symphony, from the shorter and often jaunty first and third movements to the longer and more ominous second and fourth ones. The spare orchestration, remarkably transparent and soloistic for much of the piece, distinguishes this symphony from the composer's earlier ones.

The second movement (Adagio) is another of the composer's movements haunted by death, most explicitly in the funeral march heard within. The third movement follows without pause—a scherzo (Allegretto) that has the grotesque qualities found in so many of his symphonies from the very beginning and that harkens back once again to his beloved Mahler. Shostakovich also includes, as he did in some of his other works, his own musical signature, the motto DSCH (spelled by the notes D, E-flat, C, B natural).

The finale (Adagio-Allegretto) opens with a brass and timpani quotation drawn from Wagner's *Die Walküre*, where it is associated with the so-called Annunciation of Death (“Todesverkündigung”) in the second act as Brünnhilde tells Siegmund that he must die and be taken to Valhalla. This brass theme segues into the violins playing the first three notes from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, but then veers off into a playful waltz. In addition to a reference to the Glinka song, Shostakovich includes another musical spelling—this time of BACH—as well as extended allusions to the famous “invasion” theme from the first movement of his Seventh Symphony. The haunting and miraculous ending of the work, dominated by percussion instruments, recalls the conclusion of his suppressed Fourth Symphony. Sanderling suggested a deathly image: “At the end when the percussion starts twittering and chirping, I always think of the intensive-care ward in a hospital: The person is attached to various contraptions and the dials and screens indicate that heartbeat and brain activity are gradually expiring. Then comes a vast convulsion and it's all over. The listeners feel this, too, or something like it, and are very shaken.”

—Christopher H. Gibbs, *James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Music at Bard College.*

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