

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTIETH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, November 18, 2010, at 8:00

Saturday, November 20, 2010, at 8:00

Sunday, November 21, 2010, at 3:00

Tuesday, November 23, 2010, at 7:30

Sir Andrew Davis Conductor

Vladimir Feltsman Piano

Turnage

Texan Tenebrae

Commissioned by the Canary Islands Music Festival for the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

United States premiere

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58

Allegro moderato

Andante con moto—

Rondo: Vivace

VLADIMIR FELTSMAN

INTERMISSION

Vaughan Williams

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor

Moderato maestoso

Andante sostenuto

Scherzo: Allegro pesante

Andante tranquillo

First Chicago Symphony Orchestra performances

CSO Tuesday series concerts are sponsored by United Airlines.

Steinway is the official piano of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

This program is partially supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Mark-Anthony Turnage

Born June 10, 1960, Grays, Essex, England.

Texan Tenebrae

Mark-Anthony Turnage, who is no stranger to controversy, surprised even some of the people who know his music best when he announced that he was writing an opera about Anna Nicole Smith, the American model and celebrity who died in 2007 of an apparent drug overdose, following the death of her twenty-year-old son, a lengthy lawsuit over her husband's estate, and a dispute over the paternity of her newborn daughter. Complicated and lurid stories have long been the mainstay of opera, and, in recent years, more and more contemporary subjects, sometimes practically lifted from the pages of the tabloids, have made their way to the opera house. When London's *The Guardian* conducted a poll last February, asking "Is the life and

death of Anna Nicole Smith a good subject for an opera?" 78.2 percent of the respondents said yes.

It was Turnage's first opera, *Greek*, completed in 1988, that began to attract international attention for the composer, and it also made headlines because of the violence of its theme (an urban updating of the Oedipus myth, with "Eddy" fighting the sphinx of Margaret Thatcher's conservatism); the occasional obscenity of its hard-hitting libretto; and its eclectic musical style, with touches of jazz, soul, and football songs. Turnage's roots in popular music are also particularly strong in the Miles Davis-influenced *Some Days*, the first piece of his that the Chicago Symphony played, under Bernard Haitink's baton, in 1997. (Miles

COMPOSED

2009

Commissioned by the Canary Islands Music Festival for the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

FIRST PERFORMANCE

January 21, 2010, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, by the LPO

These are the first CSO performances, U.S. premiere

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes, three oboes, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns,

three trumpets, two trombones, two soprano saxophones, tubular bells, vibraphone, triangle, güiro, bass drum, tenor drum, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, harp, celesta, piano, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

9 minutes

and Stravinsky were Turnage's two biggest obsessions when he was in his teens, and each helped to shape his own emerging voice as a composer.) Jazz and classical music cohabitate in many of Turnage's major works, particularly pieces such as *Scorched*, a work for jazz trio and orchestra that the CSO played in May 2009.

Trained at the Royal College of Music and a student, in the broadest sense of the word, of Oliver Knussen, John Lambert, Gunther Schuller, and Hans Werner Henze, Turnage became the Chicago Symphony's Mead Composer-in-Residence in 2006. During his four seasons with the Orchestra, Chicagoans heard several major new works by Turnage, including *No Let Up*, commissioned by the MusicNOW series; *From All Sides*, Turnage's first work for dance, premiered by the CSO and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, with choreography by Jorma Elo; and *Chicago Remains*, a tribute to our city's powers of reinvention and our architectural modernism—it was inspired by a Chicago River boat cruise—that was first

performed here by the Orchestra under Haitink in 2007.

Texan Tenebrae is an orchestral fantasy on material from Turnage's new opera *Anna Nicole*, which will be given its premiere by the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden in February, conducted by Antonio Pappano, with Eva-Maria Westbroek in the title role. (Turnage's librettist is Richard Thomas, who was one of the creators of *Jerry Springer: The Opera*.) *Texan Tenebrae* unfolds in a single span of slow music, dark and tragic in tone. The Texan of the title is Anna Nicole, who was born Vickie Lynn Hogan in the small town of Mexia (the town motto is "a great place, no matter how you pronounce it") near Houston, in 1967. *Tenebrae*, the Latin word for darkness or shadows, refers to the Holy Week services of penitence and lamentation. After the tolling bells that open the piece, Turnage introduces his main theme—music that is associated with Anna Nicole in the opera—which is based on a melody from Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*—songs on the death of children. ■



Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany.

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria.

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58

On December 17, 1808, a Viennese paper announced a concert to be given by Ludwig van Beethoven at the Theater an der Wien five days later: “All the pieces are of his own composition, entirely new, and not yet heard in public.” Although Beethoven’s publicist fudged that last detail ever so slightly, the list of world premieres lined up for one evening is astonishing: both the Fifth and Sixth symphonies; the *Choral Fantasy*; and this work, Beethoven’s fourth piano concerto. (Those who didn’t like too much new and unfamiliar music at one sitting surely stayed home that night.) To round out this

substantial program—long even by the generous standards of the nineteenth century—were three movements from the Mass in C, the concert aria *Ah! perfido*, and improvisations at the keyboard by the composer.

“There we sat from 6:30 till 10:30,” the composer J.F. Reichardt later recalled, “in the most bitter cold, and found by experience that one might have too much even of a good thing.” What should have been the greatest night of Beethoven’s career was ruined by too much music and too little heat. The performances were no doubt wretched, for rehearsals had gone

COMPOSED

1805–early 1806

FIRST PERFORMANCES

private: March 1807, Vienna, the composer as soloist

public premiere:

December 22, 1808, Vienna, the composer as soloist

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

November 4, 1892; Auditorium Theatre; Ferruccio Busoni, pianist; Theodore Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

November 30, 2008; Orchestra Hall; Murray Perahia, pianist; Bernard Haitink conducting

July 16, 2010; Ravinia Festival; Jorge Federico Osorio, pianist; James Conlon conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

solo piano, one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings

CADENZAS

by Beethoven

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

34 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1942 with Artur Schnabel, pianist, and Frederick Stock conducting, RCA

1963 with Van Cliburn, pianist, and Fritz Reiner conducting, RCA

1972 with Vladimir Ashkenazy, pianist, and Sir Georg Solti conducting, London

1983 with Alfred Brendel, pianist, and James Levine conducting, Philips

badly. For one thing, Beethoven had so annoyed the members of the Theater an der Wien orchestra the previous month that they now insisted that he sit in the anteroom whenever he wasn't needed at the keyboard and wait for the concertmaster to check with him between movements. Beethoven was so desperate to see this concert take place that he agreed. (It promised him both wide exposure and a nice profit.)

Not surprisingly, there wasn't enough time for the orchestra to learn so much challenging new music. Reichardt remembered that "it had been found impossible to get a single full rehearsal for all the pieces to be performed, every one of them filled with the greatest difficulties." The *Choral Fantasy*, which Beethoven composed at the very last moment (inexplicably thinking the concert lacked a blockbuster finish), was scarcely rehearsed at all. When it broke down completely during the performance, Beethoven started it over again from the beginning, making a very long evening even longer.

By all reports, Beethoven was a terrifically exciting pianist. He played with spectacular technical facility and tremendous emotional expression. According to his student Ferdinand Ries, he cared less about missed notes than character and expression: "Mistakes of the other kind, he said, were due to chance, but these last resulted from want of knowledge, feeling, or attention." When Beethoven first stepped out on stage the night of December 22, 1808, it was to play

this concerto in G major, and surely most members of the audience were surprised that he went straight to the keyboard and started to play. Anyone who troubled to buy a ticket to this concert would have known that a concerto begins with a long orchestral exposition that gives you all the tunes before the soloist begins. But Beethoven had begun to examine every convention he inherited, to rethink every choice a composer could make. He realized that the only way to call greater attention to the soloist's first line was to do something unexpected. In his Violin Concerto, first performed several months before, he had made the wait almost interminable and then sneaked the violinist in, so that if you weren't paying attention you missed it altogether. And here, he caught his audience completely off guard again by starting with the piano. It's a brilliant trick—so perfectly handled that it has hardly ever been imitated—and Beethoven quickly follows one masterstroke with another—the orchestra enters six bars later in the unexpected key of B major.

The most remarkable thing about this bold and original opening is the sustained quiet dynamics (beginning piano and then falling off to pianissimo), as if Beethoven were sharing confidences. A tone of moderation and nobility persists throughout the first movement, even in the most vigorous and brilliant passages; this, too, was unexpected. The movement is dominated throughout by a gentle version of the same four-note

rhythm with which Fate aggressively knocks on the door of the Fifth Symphony. (The German theorist Heinrich Schenker, who always doubted that Beethoven had that image in mind when he wrote the symphony, wanted to know if the concerto depicted “another



Theater an der Wien; engraving after J. Alt, ca. 1815

door on which Fate knocked or was someone else knocking at the same door?”)

The slow movement has inspired many interpretations (Orpheus taming the Furies is the most familiar one), although Beethoven evidently was thinking of nothing more dramatic than the music itself when he wrote it. This is a conversation between the strings and the piano. The strings, playing in staccato octaves, begin assertively. The piano responds with rich, quiet chords—an answer that raises questions of its own. On it goes, back and forth—the piano steadfast, the strings gradually weakening. Sensing victory, the piano unleashes a brief, rhapsodic cadenza. Finally everyone plays together, sharing the same chords and the same rhythm. Over the last chord, the piano poses

a brand new question, to which Beethoven responds by launching into the finale without a pause. Our sense of boundaries is vague: in retrospect, the entire slow movement sounds like a long introduction to the finale. (That’s exactly the case in the *Waldstein* Sonata, written two years before.)

The finale itself doesn’t behave like one at first: it’s the only one in all of Beethoven’s concertos that doesn’t begin with the soloist stating the main theme, followed by vigorous confirmation from the full orchestra. Here Beethoven opens softly with the strings, in the wrong key. The piano takes the situation in hand with a brilliant, virtuosic new theme, and the rest of the movement is swift and thrilling. The orchestral sound is enriched by the introduction of trumpets and drums, and the solo part effectively combines lyricism with bravura and elegance with wit.

After the concert, Beethoven boasted that “in spite of the fact that various mistakes were made, which I could not prevent, the public nevertheless applauded the whole performance with enthusiasm.” Reichardt particularly remembered the “new pianoforte concerto of immense difficulty, which Beethoven executed astonishingly well in the most rapid tempos.” There’s no record of how much money Beethoven made that night. His days as a celebrity performer, however, were over. His hearing had recently gotten much worse, and it turned out that this was the last time he would appear in public as a soloist. ■



Ralph Vaughan Williams

Born October 12, 1872, Gloucestershire, England.

Died August 26, 1958, London, England.

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor

On the morning that he died, Ralph Vaughan Williams had planned to attend a recording session for his Ninth Symphony, his last major work. “A friend of the family said the composer had worked as usual yesterday,” *The New York Times* reported in its obituary on August 27, 1958, “and that he seemed absolutely normal, but a little tired.” Early on the twenty-eighth, he and his wife Ursula were to have gone to a studio to sit in on the first recording sessions of the symphony with Sir Adrian Boult conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Although Boult had run through the work privately with the composer, he was eager to have Vaughan Williams in the studio to supervise. The session went on as planned. When Boult told the orchestra members of the composer’s death, they stood in silent tribute. (You can hear

Boult’s speech on a recent reissue of the recording.)

The eighty-five-year-old composer’s Ninth Symphony had been premiered four months earlier at Royal Festival Hall. “The whole of musical London, as well as many distinguished visitors from elsewhere” showed up to hear the new work by England’s most famous living composer, according to *The Musical Times*. The audience cheered at the end of the performance, but the press reception was cool and noncommittal. Although the critic for *The Daily Mail* said that the symphony “shows a spirit still keen, fresh and adventurous, an imagination deft and abundant,” others chose to write about Vaughan Williams’s novel use of the flügelhorn in the slow movement rather than assess the work as a whole, or its place in one of the most significant symphonic

COMPOSED

1956–57, revised in 1958

FIRST PERFORMANCE

April 2, 1958, London

These are the first CSO performances

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets and flügelhorn, two alto saxophones and one tenor saxophone, three trombones and tuba,

timpani, glockenspiel, xylophone, side drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, gong, tam-tam, bells, celesta, two harps, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

33 minutes

outpourings of the twentieth century. Even Boult said he felt the Ninth represented a “falling off” for the great composer. Vaughan Williams died the month before the symphony was performed in the United States, so it was inevitably received here as a valedictory work—“A mellow glow suffuses the work, as it does the work of many veteran composers who seem to gaze retrospectively over their careers,” Harold C. Schonberg wrote in *The New York Times*, mentioning Brahms, Richard Strauss, and Bartók, whose music “became calm and resigned toward the end.”

Although Vaughan Williams’s

earliest pioneering works and Karlheinz Stockhausen’s daring experimentations. At the very end of his long career, Vaughan Williams continued to accept the persistent criticism that he was old-fashioned—a charge first leveled at him nearly half a century earlier, when he declared himself a symphonist in the age of *La mer*, *Pierrot lunaire*, and *The Rite of Spring*. His first significant large-scale work, the Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis, composed in 1910, is indebted to the music of his sixteenth-century predecessor and to the great English tradition. His entire upbringing was steeped in

tradition—he was related to both the pottery Wedgwoods and Charles Darwin. (“The Bible says that God made the world in six days,” his mother told him. “Great Uncle Charles thinks it took longer: but we need not worry about it, for it is equally wonderful either way.”) He became a serious student of English folk song and edited *The English Hymnal*, vol. 2.

Even when, at the age of thirty-five, Vaughan Williams took some time off from composing to

study with Ravel, he learned greatly about color and sonority but still maintained and even sharpened his own personal style. Years later, Ravel would call him “the only one of my pupils who does not write my music.” In fact, Vaughan Williams was one of the first composers in



Vaughan Williams (left) coaches the flügelhorn player during the rehearsal for the world premiere of his Ninth Symphony in St. Pancras Town Hall, 1958

symphony was later hailed as a major score and a masterpiece, the very idea of composing a four-movement symphony in the 1950s was seen as an anachronism by a new generation of composers intent on breaking with the past—this was the time of Pierre Boulez’s

the twentieth century who managed to forge a strong personal style almost exclusively from the materials of the past. “My advice to young composers,” he wrote, “is learn your own language first, find out your own traditions, discover what you want to do.”

By 1934, following the deaths of Elgar, Holst, and Delius—all within a few months of each other—Vaughan Williams came to represent the end of the line, at least for English music. For another two decades, he continued to compose in his signature style, with its firm reliance on tonality and its fondness for conventional forms. In a career that lasted more than fifty years, from the Tallis Fantasy to the Ninth Symphony, Vaughan Williams’s language remained remarkably stable, impervious to the continual winds of revolution. Despite his conviction that “the composer must not shut himself up and think about art; he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community,” Vaughan Williams eventually became something of a lone figure in modern music—a preserver of tradition who managed to brilliantly transcend the limited genre of the staunch conservative.

Vaughan Williams’s nine symphonies, which span nearly fifty years of his career, form an unusual and distinctive expansion of the great nineteenth-century tradition. The first, *A Sea Symphony*, premiered in 1910—just five weeks after the Tallis Fantasy—sets words by Walt Whitman and is more cantata than symphony. It

was soon followed by two more: *A London Symphony*, his first purely orchestral symphony, and the *Pastoral Symphony*, started during



Vaughan Williams (right) with John Barbirolli and Ursula at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester

World War I and completed only in 1921. It was a full decade before he began a new symphony. But then, beginning in the early 1930s, he returned to the form he loved and wrote six more.

Vaughan Williams originally intended his Ninth Symphony to be programmatic. Notations on the pages of sketches include “Wessex Prelude” and “Salisbury.” The entire second movement was meant to evoke the arrest of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess* of the d’Urbervilles at Stonehenge. But, as Vaughan Williams admitted before the first performance, the program “got lost on the journey,” and the work was premiered and published simply as no. 9.

The big-boned and powerful first movement opens with a theme inspired by the organ part at the beginning of Bach’s *Saint Matthew Passion*—an “old-fashioned” kind of music grounded in tradition. This

is the kind of confident, complex, carefully argued, sweepingly paced music that few composers were still writing in the 1950s, and it reminds us how much Vaughan Williams admired Sibelius and his insistence that the symphony was the single form in which one could best express the deepest of feelings and the most complicated ideas.

The second movement, despite the composer's eventual dismissal of the program, was written to evoke the scene in Hardy's novel where Tess, after murdering her lover, escapes with her husband across Salisbury Plain toward Stonehenge, where they rest for the night. The opening theme, scored for solo flügelhorn, was borrowed from *The Solent*, an unpublished tone poem Vaughan Williams composed in 1903. (It is labeled "Stonehenge" in the composer's sketches for the symphony.) "This beautiful and neglected instrument," Vaughan Williams wrote of the flügelhorn in a short note for the premiere, "is not usually allowed in the select circles of the orchestra and has been banished to the brass band, where it is allowed to indulge in the bad habit of vibrato to its heart's content. While in the orchestra it will be obliged to sit up and play straight." Vaughan Williams himself referred to the marching music that interrupts the opening of this movement as "the ghostly

drummer of Salisbury Plain." A tender central section, scored for strings, is identified as "Tess" in the manuscript. Eventually, the Stonehenge and Tess themes are combined. Near the end of the movement, bells toll—seven times, signifying the arrival of the police, who surround Stonehenge at dawn and arrest Tess; and then, after the return of the ghostly drummer, an eighth time, signaling Tess's hanging at 8 A.M.

The main theme of the quirky, imaginatively scored scherzo is played by saxophones, echoed by the xylophone. The central section is a chorale for saxophone trio. The movement ends with the quiet tapping of the side drum. The finale is in two sections, the first launched by a broad violin melody, the second with a lyrical theme in the violas. Great E major chords sweeping through the orchestra bring to a close not only Vaughan Williams's final symphony, but also to one of the most important symphonic cycles of the twentieth century. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.