

Minnesota Orchestra

Markus Stenz, conductor

Louis Lortie, piano

Friday, April 13, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
 Saturday, April 14, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Richard Wagner	<i>Siegfried Idyll</i>	ca. 17'
Franz Liszt	Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major for Piano and Orchestra Allegro maestoso Quasi adagio - Allegretto vivace Allegro marziale animato <i>Louis Lortie, piano</i>	ca. 21'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Robert Schumann	Symphony No. 2 in C major, Opus 61 Sostenuto assai - Allegro ma non troppo Scherzo: Allegro vivace Adagio espressivo Allegro molto vivace	ca. 34'



Markus Stenz, conductor

Markus Stenz most recently visited the Minnesota Orchestra in 2005, conducting Mahler's Sixth Symphony. He is now the chief conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, principal guest conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and conductor in residence of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. He has conducted many of the world's leading orchestras, and he is known for his vibrant, masterful musical interpretations, and his special passion for German orchestral works. His 2017-18 season includes performances with the St. Louis, Colorado, Utah and San Diego symphonies, as well as international engagements at major halls in Brazil, Britain, Finland, France,

Germany, Japan, the Netherlands and South Korea. His previous positions have included general music director of the City of Cologne and Gürzenich-Kapellmeister, principal guest conductor of the Hallé Orchestra, music director of the Montepulciano Festival, principal conductor of the London Sinfonietta, and artistic director and chief conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. More: kirshbaumassociates.com, markusstenz.com.



Louis Lortie, piano

French Canadian pianist Louis Lortie has appeared with the Minnesota Orchestra several times since his Orchestra Hall debut in 1989. He is currently the artist

in residence at the Shanghai Symphony, with which he performs four different programs throughout this season. His other engagements in the 2017-18 season include performances with the Chicago, BBC, Dallas and Adelaide symphony orchestras, and at the annual Liszt Festival in Raiding, Austria. He also performs two recitals at London's Wigmore Hall and embarks on an extensive recital tour in Italy. He has made more than 45 recordings for the Chandos label, covering repertoire from Mozart to Stravinsky, including a set of the complete Beethoven sonatas and the complete Liszt *Années de Pèlerinage*, which was named one of the ten best recordings of 2012 by *The New Yorker*. His current recording projects include Poulenc works for piano and orchestra with the BBC Philharmonic and music by Fauré and Scriabin. More: seldycramerartists.com, louislortie.com.

one-minute notes

Wagner: *Siegfried Idyll*

The *Siegfried Idyll*, one of Wagner's few purely instrumental works, is lovely, warm and melodic music. Conceived as a love token from the composer to his wife Cosima, it was premiered as a surprise to her on Christmas morning, with the musicians performing on the staircase to her bedroom.

Liszt: Piano Concerto No. 1

The powerful main theme of Liszt's First Piano Concerto, punctuated each time by winds and brass, finds key moments to recur throughout the work's four movements, which are played without pause. Among the musical highlights are the cascading notes in the piano cadenzas, the poetic *Quasi adagio* second movement and the unusually prominent use of the triangle.

Schumann: Symphony No. 2

Echoing Schumann's own mental strife, the Second Symphony opens in a troubled, shadowy landscape, with many of its melodies wandering or melancholic. As it progresses, the music grows in confidence and concludes with emotional, triumphant gestures.



Richard Wagner

Born: May 22, 1813,
Leipzig, Germany
Died: February 13, 1883,
Venice, Italy

Siegfried Idyll

Premiered: December 25, 1870

An understanding of Wagner's lovely *Siegfried Idyll* requires some knowledge of the details of that composer's irregular personal life. In 1864, at the age of 51, Wagner began an affair with 27-year-old Cosima von Bülow, the daughter of Franz Liszt and wife of pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow. Wagner and Cosima's daughter Isolde was born the following April, on the same day Bülow conducted the first rehearsal of *Tristan and Isolde*. All concerned agreed to keep details of the situation a secret, and the infant's birth certificate listed Bülow as the father, Wagner as the godfather. Cosima bore Wagner two more children, a daughter Eva in 1867 and a son Siegfried in 1869, and moved in with him in 1868. Finally, in 1870—after a six-year relationship and three children—the couple was married.

a Christmas surprise

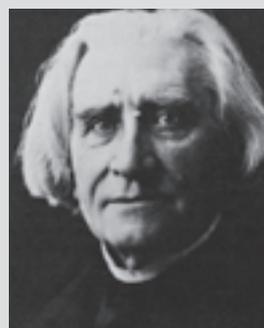
That fall, Cosima became aware that Wagner was working on a project he would not describe to her, and for good reason: it was to be one of the best surprises in the history of music. On Christmas morning, Cosima, asleep with 18-month-old Siegfried, awoke to the sound of music. Her husband had secretly composed and rehearsed a piece for small orchestra, and now that orchestra, arranged on the staircase leading to Cosima's bedroom, gave this music its most unusual premiere.

This music was not just a token of love and a Christmas present, but also a birthday present: Cosima had turned 33 a few weeks earlier. It is based on themes from Wagner's (at that time still unperformed) opera *Siegfried*, but it also uses a child's cradle song and other themes with personal meaning for Wagner and Cosima. Their private title for the piece was *Tribtschen Idyll*: they were living at Tribtschen on Lake Lucerne in Switzerland at the time, and Cosima felt that the music was an embodiment of their life and love in these years. When in 1878, pressed for cash, Wagner had the music published under the now-familiar title *Siegfried Idyll*, Cosima confessed in her diary: "My secret treasure is becoming common property; may the joy it will give mankind be commensurate with the sacrifice I am making."

As good love music should be, the *Siegfried Idyll* is gentle, warm, and melodic. Listeners familiar with the opera *Siegfried* will recognize some of the themes, all associated with the young hero Siegfried: his horn call, the bird call from the *Forest Murmurs* sequence, and others. Wagner also quotes, in the oboe near the beginning, the old cradle song "Sleep, Little Child, Sleep." At its premiere, this music was performed on Cosima's staircase by an orchestra of 15 players, though the bass player was around a corner and could not see Wagner conduct.

Instrumentation: flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.



Franz Liszt

Born: October 22, 1811,
Raasdorf, Hungary
Died: July 31, 1886,
Bayreuth, Germany

Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major for Piano and Orchestra

Premiered: February 17, 1855

The sudden spurt in physical growth achieved by Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony presented Romantic-era composers with new problems in musical organization and form, problems that affected not only big pieces like Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, but also comparatively short ones such as Liszt's First Piano Concerto.

Sketches for this concerto go back to about 1830, and Liszt worked on the score in the late 1840s and again in 1853. Still more revisions of detail followed the premiere, which took place at Weimar on February 17, 1855, with Liszt at the piano and Berlioz conducting.

understanding the concerto

Liszt's lifelong exploration of musical form was most extraordinarily, most richly rewarded in his B-minor Piano Sonata of 1852-53, a work in which nobility of spirit, intellectual power and fascinatingly virtuosic writing exist in perfect equipoise. If the First Piano Concerto has never shared the intellectual respectability of the Sonata, or even of Liszt's Second Piano Concerto of 1857-61, it is a piece pianists have always enjoyed playing and one that audiences love to hear.

It is said that Liszt and his son-in-law, the brilliant pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, put words to the First Piano

Concerto's two opening measures: "Das versteht ihr alle nicht—haha!" (The German words conform to the rhythm, though the English translation does not: "None of you understand this—ha-ha!")

The story sounds believable. Certainly Bülow never passed up an opportunity to express his sense of superiority. I cannot say what exactly he and Liszt had in mind. It is easy to be dazzled by the flying octaves in this concerto (after all, that is what they are for) and to take note of the unusual prominence accorded the triangle (and for some to take umbrage as well), and perhaps the point that Liszt and Bülow were trying to make, even if they were only talking to each other, is that there is more to the E-flat Concerto than that—more invention, more wit and more poetry. Liszt may have been one of the 19th century's most exasperating underachievers, to say nothing of committing the unforgivable sin of success on a staggering scale, but he was a genius.

the music: ambiguous harmony, passion and drama

allegro maestoso. "Das versteht ihr alle nicht"—as goes Liszt and Bülow's lyric—is a simple and powerful phrase for strings in octaves; "haha!" is a firm punctuation mark added by woodwinds and brass. Liszt repeats the phrase a step lower, leading to a startlingly different harmony. At this point, widening the harmonic horizons still further, the pianist makes his presence known in an imposing cadenza. There, in essence, is Liszt's method for this astonishing movement, which is filled with harmonic ambiguity. Again and again he returns to his opening phrase; and each time it leads to something new, to a recitative, to a lyric melody, to thundering octaves, and finally to weightlessly glittering passagework that ends the movement in a puff of smoke.

quasi adagio-allegretto vivace-allegro marziale animato. Liszt connects the second, third and fourth movements together without pause. He does not specify *attacca* in the transition from the first movement to the second, but it is clear that this is what he means. The strings lead off and suggest a melody that the piano then sings for us in full. This is one of Liszt's most beautiful inspirations, full of passion and poetry.

When the passions have calmed, woodwind soloists present a new idea against a decorative background provided by piano and strings. But when the clarinet offers to bring back the great melody from the beginning of the movement, there is an interruption: silence, the ping of a triangle, and the dancing reply of plucked strings. Berlioz, on the podium at the concerto's premiere, must have been delighted by this bow to his Faustian goblins.

Liszt breaks off this scherzo for a cadenza. The pianist recalls the beginning of the concerto, and suddenly those pages loom large again in a dramatic and developing restatement, which in turn opens the way for the martial finale.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, cymbals, triangle and strings

Program note excerpted from the late **Michael Steinberg's** *The Concerto: A Listener's Guide* (Oxford University Press, 1998), used with permission.



Robert Schumann
Born: June 8, 1810,
 Zwickau, Germany
Died: July 29, 1856,
 Endenich (near Bonn), Germany

**Symphony No. 2 in C major,
 Opus 61**
Premiered: November 5, 1846

As Robert Schumann entered his 30s, he had established himself as a family man; thanks to an honorary degree from the University of Jena he was now Herr Doktor Schumann; and, no doubt with plenty of urging from his wife Clara, he was eager to prove himself in the more ambitious calling of the larger forms of the symphony, the string quartet and the oratorio.

Here we encounter the influence of Beethoven, as we will almost anywhere in a study of 19th-century instrumental music. In Schumann's Symphony No. 1, the *Spring* Symphony, the debt to Beethoven is less direct, but more than once we hear echoes of Beethoven's Fourth. In his great Symphony No. 2, Schumann confronted Beethoven the symphonist head-on. Like Beethoven's Fifth, Schumann's Second traces a course from adversity to triumph that most listeners in the day had no difficulty in recognizing. Schumann's boldness was rewarded: This became the greatest of his symphonies, a judgment about which most mid-19th-century listeners found themselves in ready agreement.

The symphony's premiere, however, was not a happy event. Felix Mendelssohn conducted the first performance at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig on November 5, 1846. The concert's first half consisted of excerpts from Weber's *Euryanthe* and Rossini's *William Tell*, and Schumann's symphony was performed by a tired orchestra and conductor to an audience too tired to absorb this difficult new work. Moreover, the *William Tell* Overture had been encored, and Schumann's rancorous supporters accused those who had demanded the encore—and even Mendelssohn—of sabotaging his symphony.

music from convalescence

Schumann's Symphony No. 2 is music written in convalescence. The composer began work on it in the latter part of 1845 and

completed it the following year. He had suffered his first bout of what was then called “melancholia” in 1828, and more such sieges, many of them accompanied by frighteningly concrete suicide fantasies, followed in 1830, 1831, 1833, 1837, 1838, 1839 and 1842. His breakdown in August 1844, with trembling, tinnitus and phobias (especially with regard to heights and sharp metallic objects) was the worst of any.

Several years after this misery, he wrote to D. G. Otten, a conductor in Hamburg, that he feared the “semi-invalid state [could] be divined from the music [of the Second Symphony]. I began to feel more myself when I wrote the last movement and was certainly much better when I finished the whole work. All the same, it reminds me of dark days.”

the music: beautiful and enigmatic, with nods to the past
sostenuto assai-allegro ma non troppo. The Second Symphony starts with a slow introduction—not one that exudes assurance, but one that is troubled. Brass instruments sound a summons, but the music of the wandering strings casts strange shadows across it. The summons itself, the keynote and fifth note of the scale, is so simple as to be virtually a cliché. The *Allegro*, which this dark exordium struggles to find, is a jagged thing, pierced even on its last pages by the summons of the first measures.

This is an interestingly eccentric movement. The first theme is sharply rhythmic, with biting accents on the second of the three beats in each measure. The harmonies veer far to the flat side before settling in the dominant, G major, with a new theme, smooth in outline, urgent in expression. The exposition is very short, and the development, mostly concerned with material from the later part of the exposition, is about two and a half times as long. Schumann, I suspect, had been studying Beethoven’s *Eroica*. Similarly, the coda is extraordinarily and powerfully expansive.

scherzo: allegro vivace. To offset the intensity of the first *Allegro*, Schumann brings not the slow movement we expect, but a *Scherzo*. Like the one in the *Spring* Symphony, it has two trios. The first one here is rustic, while the other offers a touching blend of the dreamy and the learned.

The second trio also presents, first shyly, then with growing confidence, the name BACH (B-flat/A/C/B-natural, if you use the German names for the notes). Schumann had spent the recuperative months of 1845 in an intensive study of Bach, which he felt had greatly contributed to his recovery, and his two sets of fugues, Opus 72 and Opus 60 (the latter also on the name BACH), date from that time. On the *Scherzo*’s last page, the fanfare rings out in triumph. The *Scherzo* itself is the only out-and-out virtuoso piece among Schumann’s symphonies. In all probability, every violinist in every major orchestra today has had to play its opening page at his or her audition.

adagio espressivo. Neither of the two Schumann symphonies that preceded this one (the *Spring* and the first version of what we now know as No. 4) had a true slow movement; here Schumann gives us one of heart-stopping beauty.

allegro molto vivace. The finale is an original and extraordinary conception in expression and structure, and, I would say, a sign of marvelous mental health. It begins with a fierce rush of energy—to be specific, a scale followed by four chords—which clears the path for an athletic, jolly and perhaps surprisingly neutral first theme.

Next, the melody of the *Adagio* is revisited at high speed. The first theme returns briefly, after which the initial scale, followed now by six chords, provides fuel for a vigorous development, in which remembrances from the first and third movements also have a part to play.

This driving music sings to a quiet, spacious close in C minor. What follows is one of the most tenderly poetic moments in the whole symphonic literature. It turns out that the oboe had listened carefully, as we perhaps did not, to the way the four chords of the opening gesture turned into six. At any rate, it now transforms those macho chords into a lyric melody of the most poignant sweetness, the sense of distance and mystery being enhanced by the strangeness in this context of the key, E-flat major.

After a tremendous building over rolling drums and rushing scales, the melody appears in the strings as an all but literal quotation from Beethoven’s song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved). This song had poignant significance in Schumann’s personal life. He had cited the same phrase in the glorious Piano Fantasy of 1836—a year of enforced physical separation from Clara. Now, in the mid-1840s, they were together as husband and wife, as parents of four children. But in some painful way, there was still a void between Lover and Beloved.

Nevertheless, the tender melancholy of this allusion is swept aside by gestures of triumph, by the sound of the C-major summons with which this beautiful and enigmatic symphony began. It might be some time before you realize that, while the opening four measure flourish assumed greater and greater significance throughout the finale, the “official” first and second themes had vanished from circulation altogether.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program note excerpted from the late Michael Steinberg’s The Symphony: A Listener’s Guide (Oxford University Press, 1996), used with permission.