

Notes for Classics 6: Passion's Pursuit

Saturday, February 16 and Sunday, February 17

James Lowe, Music Director Finalist — Haochen Zhang, piano

- **Zhou Tian – *Rise* (West coast premiere)**
- **Franz Liszt – Hungarian Rhapsody No 2 in C minor**
- **Franz Liszt – Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major**
- **Johannes Brahms – Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98**

Franz Liszt

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-sharp minor, S. 244 (arr. Karl Müller-Berghaus)

Composer: born October 22, 1811, Raiding, (Doborján); died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth

Work composed: Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 was composed in 1847 and is dedicated to Count László Teleki. Karl Müller-Berghaus published his arrangement for orchestra in 1872.

World premiere: undocumented. The first American performance of Müller-Berghaus' arrangement took place in Boston on November 3, 1883, with George Henschel leading the Boston Symphony.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, triangle, harp, and strings

Estimated duration: 11 minutes

Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, originally composed for solo piano, proved so popular that a number were subsequently orchestrated, both by Liszt and other composers. All the Rhapsodies feature unparalleled virtuosity, colorful Gypsy melodies and the distinctive rhythms of Hungarian folk music. No. 2, in both its original piano version and orchestral arrangements, is one of Liszt's most famous works. It features two principal sections, the *Lassan* (slow), and the *Friska* (quick). Karl Müller-Berghaus' arrangement, transposed down one half step from Liszt's original key of C-sharp minor to C minor, highlights the lively rhythms and brilliant colors of Liszt's original.

Fans of both MGM and Warner Brothers cartoons may recognize this music from Tom & Jerry's "The Cat Concerto," which won the 1946 Academy Award for Best Short Subject: Cartoon, or the oddly similar 1947 Bugs Bunny short *Rhapsody Rabbit*. (Each studio accused the other of poaching the concept). The Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 has also been featured in several Marx Brothers' movies, Mickey Mouse cartoons, and in the 1988 animated film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*

Zhou Tian

Rise (West Coast premiere)

Composer: born December 22, 1981, Hangzhou, China

Work composed: A co-commission of the Allentown Symphony, Erie Philharmonic, and Spokane Symphony, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the United State's involvement in WWI.

World premiere: Diane Wittry led the Allentown Symphony in the first performance, on November 11, 2018

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, tam tam, piano, harp, and strings.

Estimated duration: 6.5 minutes

Chinese-born American composer Zhou Tian (JOH TEE-en; Zhou is his surname) writes music described as “absolutely beautiful,” “utterly satisfying” (*Fanfare*), and “a prime example of 21st-century global multiculturalism” (*Broad Street Review*). Zhou’s music has been performed by the Pittsburgh Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, pianist Yuja Wang, and the Empire Brass Quintet, among others. Zhou taught at the University of Southern California and Colgate University, and is currently on the faculty of Michigan State University College of Music.

“*Rise* is a new orchestral work inspired by diaries of American soldiers during World War I,” Zhou writes. “While visiting the Library of Congress, I was drawn to the personal and unmediated experiences and emotions that the soldiers themselves wrote on the battleground. Whether it is a brief note about the weather, a long entry about losing a comrade, or a touching moment when a letter from home arrives, the soldiers’ stories moved me deeply.” Zhou mentions several quotes, including one from First Lieutenant Quincy Ayres: “Letters from home are like the heavens breaking through depressing clouds.”

“*Rise* attempts to convey the emotions of the simple servicemen – their fears, frustrations, love and awe – through the intimacy and power of the symphony orchestra,” Zhou continues. “It is a musical postcard from America’s coming-of-age war, 100 years later.”

Franz Liszt

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major

Work composed: 1839-49, rev. several times before its premiere in 1857. A final revision was made in 1861. Dedicated to Liszt’s pupil Hans von Bronsart, who gave the premiere.

World premiere: Liszt conducted the premiere with the Weimar orchestra on January 7, 1857, with von Bronsart at the piano

Instrumentation: solo piano, 3 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, and strings.

Estimated duration: 22 minutes

Franz Liszt came rather late to writing orchestral music, although he was prolific in other genres. Initially, Liszt lacked a strong knowledge of orchestral instruments and how best to showcase their ranges, colors and capabilities. When Liszt took a job as conductor for the court of Weimar, in 1848, he had regular access to an orchestra, and quickly incorporated his newfound knowledge into his own compositions.

Both of Liszt's piano concertos are most innovative in their experiments with the structure of a typical piano concerto. Instead of the standard three movements, Liszt condensed the second concerto into a seamless one-movement work, held together by a single theme. This idea allowed Liszt to present his concept of "transformation of themes," in which the main idea morphs into a series of guises, although it remains recognizable throughout. Liszt's original title for the concerto, *Concerto Symphonique*, reinforces his concept of the concerto as an essentially symphonic work.

Although ostensibly one movement, the Piano Concerto No. 2 is more like a fantasia in six episodes. The colorful central theme, first played by the clarinets supported by a wind chorale, binds them together. The six episodes feature a range of harmonies and dynamic contrasts, in support of the ever-shifting theme. Rather than complete linear statements, Liszt's phrases sometimes trail off, unfinished. Pianist Alfred Brendel noted, "There is something fragmentary about Liszt's work ... but is the fragment not the purest, most legitimate form of Romanticism? ... It is the business of the interpreter to show us how a general pause may connect rather than separate ... By some process incomprehensible to the intellect, organic unity becomes established ... Anyone who does not know the allure of the fragmentary will remain a stranger to much of Liszt's work."

Liszt uses piano cadenzas to facilitate transitions between sections, and the piano also gives its solo duties to a cello on two different occasions. The chromaticism of the melody gives it the flexibility to shift from one key or mood to another. Each time the melody transforms, it assumes a different characteristic: sensuous, dramatic, wistful, bold, somber, or tranquil. It is easy to imagine to the numerous facets of Liszt's own personality in this array of musical guises. The concerto ends with a vigorous march, a gently contrasting lyrical interlude, and a dynamic final coda.

Johannes Brahms

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

Composer: born May 7, 1833, Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, Vienna

Work composed: Brahms composed the Fourth Symphony during the summers of 1884-85 in Mürzzuschlag, his summer retreat in the mountains southwest of Vienna.

World premiere: Brahms led the Meiningen Court Orchestra on October 25, 1885.

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, triangle, and strings.

Estimated duration: 40 minutes

In a 1947 essay titled “Brahms the Progressive,” Arnold Schoenberg described Johannes Brahms as one of only a few composers whose music emerges from a simultaneous and indivisible combination of inspiration and intellectual skill. Brahms’ Fourth Symphony is an exquisite synthesis of heart and mind; its elegance suggests a mathematical equation whose deceptively simple formula expresses new, startling and complex concepts.

Brahms composed the Fourth Symphony during the summers of 1884-85 in Mürzzuschlag, his summer retreat in the mountains southwest of Vienna. In September 1885, Brahms wrote to Hans von Bülow, conductor of the Meiningen Orchestra, expressing his hope that von Bülow would take on the new symphony. Brahms also admitted to doubt about the work’s appeal: “I’m really afraid it [the Fourth Symphony] tastes like the climate here. The cherries don’t ripen in these parts; you wouldn’t eat them!” Brahms needn’t have worried; after his first rehearsal of Op. 98, von Bülow wrote, “No. 4 gigantic, altogether a law unto itself, quite new, steely individuality. Exudes unparalleled energy from first note to last.”

Despite Brahms’ misgivings that the public would not respond well to his “neue traurige Symphonie” (new tragic symphony), the audience’s reacted enthusiastically at the premiere, applauding each movement. The influential 19th century critic Eduard Hanslick, a lifelong champion of Brahms’ music, included this encomium in his review: “Brahms is unique in his resources of genuine symphonic invention; in his sovereign mastery of all the secrets of counterpoint, harmony, and instrumentation; in the logic of development combined with the most beautiful freedom of fantasy.”

The main theme of the *Allegro non troppo* reveals Brahms’ gift for economy: the essence of this lyrical sighing melody is its first four notes. Brahms’ endlessly inventive elaborations and development of these four notes generate much of the music of this movement. Countering the criticisms of his work as “too cerebral,” in the *Andante moderato*, Brahms writes music of pure aural pleasure.

The *Allegro giocoso* begins with an energetic wallop of sound and an amusingly odd rhythm; here Brahms gives us a glimpse of his humorous side. At the premiere, the audience delighted in this rowdy ebullient music and called for an encore. While Brahms was pleased with the reaction, he declined the request.

For many years Brahms had been drawn to the Baroque form of the *chaconne*, a series of variations in a slow tempo, usually in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. In an 1877 letter to Clara Schumann, Brahms shared his fascination with this format: “If I could picture myself writing, or even conceiving, such a piece, I am certain that the extreme excitement and emotional tension would have driven me mad.” For the *Allegro energico e passionato*, Brahms wrote a *chaconne* with 32 variations and a coda. Hanslick described the last movement as exhibiting “an astonishing harmonic and contrapuntal art never conspicuous as such and never an exercise of mere musical erudition.” Brahms’ absolute mastery of form is revealed in this music of profound depth and power.