

Tania Miller conducts the Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Thursday, October 10, 2024 at 8pm

This is the 1,326th concert in Koerner Hall

Tania Miller, conductor

Isabella Perron, violin

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

PROGRAM

Hector Berlioz: *Le carnaval romain*, op. 9

Johannes Brahms: Violin Concerto in D Major, op. 77

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Adagio

III. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace

INTERMISSION

Jean Sibelius: Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, op. 39

I. Andante ma non troppo: Allegro energico

II. Andante, ma non troppo lento

III. Scherzo: Allegro

IV. Finale: Quasi una Fantasia

Hector Berlioz

Born in La Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France, December 11, 1803; died in Paris, France, March 8, 1869

Le carnaval romain (Roman Carnival Overture), op. 9 (1843-4)

After several failed attempts to win the coveted Prix de Rome, the radical-minded Hector Berlioz eventually found his way around the conservative judges and, from 1830, spent 15 months based at the Villa Medici in Rome. Unhappy with the city, if delighted with Florence, Berlioz duly thanked the country, its composers, and singers with some well-chosen bons mots from his waspish journalist pen. But Italian life and culture left an indelible impression on his music. First came the symphony *Harold in Italy* in 1832. Four years later, Berlioz wrote the opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, followed by another symphony, *Romeo and Juliet*. The next two decades resulted in both the *Corsaire* overture and the five-act opera *The Trojans*. No other country made so enduring an impression on his vivid imagination.

In 1843, Berlioz began to draw a concert overture titled *Roman Carnival* from an opera he and his librettists fashioned from the autobiography of his lifelong hero, the 16th century Italian sculptor, goldsmith, and musician Benvenuto Cellini. Its busily chattering main theme, which dances cheerfully from strings to winds, has its origins in a brilliant choral carnival scene set on the Piazza Colonna. The famous English horn solo, which forms the basis of the slow section of the overture, is a love duet between Cellini and Teresa in Act One. Both themes are varied in thoroughly idiosyncratic ways and worked up fugally with great élan. Towards the end, they are combined in a characteristically Berlioz manner, building to a climax every bit as thrilling and exhilarating as in the opera. Even when the momentum is unstoppable, with full orchestra blazing resonantly, the texture of Berlioz's score remains transparent. Berlioz recognised the originality of this orchestral showpiece when he wrote that its music possesses "variety of ideas, a vitality, zest, and brilliance of musical colour such as I shall perhaps never find again."

Johannes Brahms

Born in Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833; died in Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1897

Violin Concerto in D Major, op. 77 (1878)

The decision to invite his violinist friend Joseph Joachim to collaborate on a concerto was central to Brahms's concept of his only violin concerto. Virtuosity is not grafted onto the music; it grows from within music of symphonic breadth and character. Polish violinist-composer Henryk Wieniawski wrote off the score as unplayable. Conductor Hans von Bülow, another friend, quipped that while Bruch had written a concerto *for* the violin, Brahms had written one *against* it. A later violinist, Bronislaw Huberman, won this war of words when he described the Brahms as "a concerto *for* violin *against* orchestra – in which the violin *wins!*"

In the half century since the death of Beethoven, the tradition of leaving the cadenza for the soloist to improvise had all but died out. By entrusting his first movement cadenza to Joachim, Brahms found a way in which he could bind his own music to past tradition. Joachim's cadenza soon became so intimately connected with Brahms's concerto that it is usually the one heard to this day. The concerto looks back to classical practice in another way – by keeping the first appearance of the soloist in reserve until the orchestra has presented much of the material of the first movement. When the violin does appear, it presents a variation of the first theme, in the *minor* key, later introducing a new theme of its own. Throughout, the treatment is symphonic, with orchestra and soloist taking an equal share in the working-out of themes. Indeed, the extensive correspondence with Joachim shows that Brahms initially planned the work in four movements – like a symphony – rather than the customary three. Soon, however, the middle two movements were removed (the scherzo was later drafted into the Second Piano Concerto) and Brahms substituted what he called a 'feeble Adagio.'

This 'feeble' slow movement opens with one of the classical repertoire's great tunes, on the oboe rather than violin. When the soloist does take up the melody, it is elaborated and made more idiomatic to the string instrument. The movement artfully disguises itself as a free-sounding meditation on this magnificent leisurely melody. The finale presents another aspect of Brahms's idiom: the Hungarian roma ('gypsy') style which he learned in his youth from violinist Eduard Reményi. In spirit, the music resembles that of the *Hungarian Dance* collections that Brahms wrote both before and after the concerto. Its exuberance contrasts well with the serious tone of the opening two movements and serves as an homage to the work's patient collaborator, Joseph Joachim.

Jean Sibelius

Born in Hämeenlinna, Finland, December 8, 1865; died in Järvenpää, Finland, September 20, 1957

Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, op. 39 (1898-9)

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius was 34, with several large-scale orchestral works behind him, by the time he completed his 'official' First Symphony. He viewed the rhapsodic, programmatic *Kullervo* symphony, written six years earlier, as more symphonic poem than true symphony. Based on the Finnish nationalistic epic *Kalevala*, this earlier 70-minute symphony with two vocal movements immediately brought him to the attention of nationalists. It paved the way for the First Symphony, which was a triumph when Sibelius himself conducted its first performance in Helsinki, April 26, 1899.

The work opens enigmatically, with a lonely clarinet melody, accompanied at the outset by a roll on timpani. Out of the clouds comes a more focussed theme on strings and, with it, an unmistakable feeling that the symphony is going to evolve on a large scale. The power of the writing is asserted as the music builds to a stirring climax, with ringing brass – they are to be a memorable feature of the entire symphony. Chattering woodwinds herald another group of themes. Like everything heard so far, the new themes appear to grow out of the opening clarinet theme. Underlining the entire first movement is a sense of pent-up strength and energy, which Sibelius, with his emerging symphonic mastery, unleashes in waves.

The latent melancholy of the opening movement is given full expression in the slow movement. A melancholy mood prevails even when Sibelius breaks away from the main theme for contrasting, often fiery episodes. The tolling, dotted rhythm of its Tchaikovsky-like opening melody is a unifying element throughout. In the Scherzo, the mood turns more urgent, almost bitter. The movement's volatile energy is broken by a trio that is Sibelius to the core. Its harmonies are unsettling and forward-looking to the lonely, isolated voice of the composer of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies. If the passionate, yearning theme which introduces the finale sounds familiar, it is because it is a more sonorous version of the clarinet theme from the opening. It forms the first of several themes that build towards a grand C major melody of epic, romantic grandeur and release. In his later symphonies, Sibelius might weave the finale's directness and romantic surge into structures of greater subtlety and elusiveness. For the present, however, the young Sibelius enjoys his ability to create an epic quality in his symphonic writing. He pauses briefly at the work's conclusion to rein in the easily won expansiveness of the writing. The mood is sombre and the symphony winds up in E minor, the dark key that predominates throughout.

- Program notes copyright © 2024 Keith Horner

Tania Miller

Conductor

Canadian Conductor Tania Miller is Artistic Director of the Brott Music Festival, and Artistic Director and Conductor of the National Academy Orchestra of Canada and BrottOpera. Maestra Miller was Music Director of Canada's Victoria Symphony for 14 years, and was named Music Director Emerita for her commitment to the orchestra and community. She has distinguished herself as a visionary leader and innovator and has gained a national reputation as a highly effective advocate and communicator for the arts.

Miller has conducted the KBS Symphony in Seoul and the Virtuoso Chamber Orchestra at the World Orchestra Festival in Daegu, South Korea. She recently appeared with the Warsaw Philharmonic, and has guest conducted orchestras across Canada, the United States, and in Europe, including the Bern Symphony Orchestra in Switzerland, Poland's NFM Wrocław Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Oregon Symphony, Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, Ottawa's National Arts Centre Orchestra, Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal, Vancouver Symphony, Orchestre symphonique de Québec, Naples Philharmonic, Rhode Island Philharmonic, Hartford Symphony, New Haven Symphony, Madison Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Winnipeg Symphony, Louisiana Philharmonic, Baton Rouge Symphony, Springfield Symphony, and numerous others.

Miller recently conducted soprano Sondra Radvanovsky with Vancouver's Opera West, Brott Opera's 2024 Rossini *Barber of Seville*, Vancouver Opera's 2023 Mozart *Die Zauberflöte*, Calgary Opera's 2022 Lehár *Merry Widow*, and numerous opera productions as Artistic Director of Michigan Opera Works and guest conductor of Opera

McGill in Montreal. She was assistant conductor of the Carmel Bach Festival for four seasons, and assistant and associate conductor of the Vancouver Symphony from 2000-04.

Isabella Perron

Violin

Radio Canada's Classical Revelation for 2020-21, violinist, violist, singer, and pianist Isabella d'Éloize Perron is a passionate advocate for music's transformative power. She believes that music and nature are deeply intertwined, and that they both have the ability to teach us about the human experience. Originally from Montreal, Isabella spent her formative years in Calgary, studying violin with Bill van der Sloot. She made her solo debut at age seven with the I Musici String Ensemble, and has since performed with orchestras worldwide winning numerous awards, including first prize at the National Music Festival of Canada (2014), first prize at the International Radio Competition for Young Musicians Concertino Praga (2015), and the Orford Musique competition's Grand Prize (2021). As part of her *Radio Canada* Classical Revelation award, she commissioned Métis composer Gregory Borton to create a work for piano and violin, which they recorded with *Radio Canada*.

Perron, BMus '24 (GGS), is a Grand Prize winner of The Robert W. and G Ann Corcoran Concerto Competition.

Isabella recently completed several sold-out tours across Canada and the United States, as well as an album, performing Vivaldi's and Piazzolla's *Four Seasons*, which included her debut on the Perelman Stage at Carnegie Hall.

Isabella plays on a Guadagnini 1768, generously on loan from CANIMEX.

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Joaquin Valdepeñas, Resident Conductor

The Royal Conservatory Orchestra (RCO), part of the Temerty Orchestral Program, is widely regarded as an outstanding ensemble and one of the best training orchestras in North America. Through the RCO Guest Conductor Program, four renowned conductors work with the RCO each season, allowing Glenn Gould School students to gain experience through professional rehearsal and performance conditions. A full week of rehearsals culminates in a Koerner Hall performance under the batons of such distinguished guest conductors as Sir Roger Norrington, former Ichnatowycz Chair in Piano Leon Fleisher, Bramwell Tovey, Johannes Debus, Peter Oundjian, Gábor Takács-Nagy, Ivars Taurins, Tania Miller, Andrei Feher, Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw, Nathan Brock, Julian Kuerti, Uri Mayer, Tito Muñoz, Andrés Keller, and Lior Shambadal. With four annual performances, participation in the RCO ensures that instrumental students in the Bachelor of Music and the Artist Diploma Program of The Glenn Gould School graduate with extensive orchestral performance experience. Additionally, winners of The Robert W. and G. Ann Corcoran Concerto Competition have the opportunity to appear each year as soloists with the RCO. Graduates of the RCO have joined the ranks of the greatest orchestras in the world, including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the BBC Orchestra, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Tafelmusik, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus. In addition to performances in Koerner Hall, the RCO has performed on numerous occasions at the Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre in Kingston, has been heard repeatedly on the national broadcasts of the *CBC Radio*, and in May 2024 made its Carnegie Hall debut under Maestro Peter Oundjian.