

Don

Juan (after Nicolaus Lenau), Op. 20 (1888)

RICHARD STRAUSS N 1864-1949

It was in the 1630 drama *El Burlador de Sevilla* (“*The Seducer of Seville*”) by the Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina that the fantastic character of Don Juan first strutted upon the world’s stages. Tirso based his play on folk legends that were at least a century old in his day, and whose roots undoubtedly extend deeply into some Jungian archetype of masculine virility shared, from complementary viewpoints, by men and women alike. Don Juan found frequent literary representations thereafter, notably in works by Molière, Dumas, Byron, Espronceda, de Musset, Zorrilla and Shaw.

A story of such intense passion was bound to inspire composers as well as men of letters, and Gluck, Delibes, Alfano, Dargomyzhsky and half a dozen others wrote pieces based on the character and his exploits. The most famous treatment of the tale is, of course, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, and it was through that opera that Richard Strauss first became acquainted with the Spanish Lothario. In June 1885, Strauss attended a production of Paul Heyse’s play *Don Juans Ende* with his mentor, Hans von Bülow, and the drama and its subject, building on the influence of Mozart’s masterpiece, made a powerful impression on the young composer.

For the program of his tone poem inspired by Don Juan, Strauss went not to da Ponte, the librettist of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, or the Spanish authors who were the source of the fantastic character, but to the 19th-century Hungarian poet Nicolaus Lenau. In the author’s words, “My Don Juan is no hot-blooded man, eternally pursuing women. It is the longing in him to find a woman who is to him womanhood incarnate, and to enjoy in the one all the women on earth whom he cannot as individuals possess. Because he does not find her, although he reels from one to another, at last Disgust seizes hold of him, and this Disgust is the Devil that fetches him.” In Lenau’s version, Don Juan meets his death in a sword duel with the father of one of the women he has seduced. Disillusioned and empty, ready for death, he drops his guard and welcomes his fate.

Strauss’ tone poem captures the feverish emotion and charged sensuality of Lenau’s drama, but other than three abstruse excerpts from Lenau’s poem that appear in the score, the composer never gave a specific program for *Don Juan*. (He learned early in his career that he could get far more publicity by letting critics and commentators contend over such details.)

The body of the work comprises themes associated with the lover and his conquests. The vigorous opening strain and a stentorian melody proclaimed by the horns near the mid-point of the work belong to Don Juan. The music depicting the women in his life is variously coquettish, passionate and ravishing. (Norman Del Mar called the beautiful oboe melody “one of the greatest lovesongs in all music”). In the closing pages, an enormous crescendo is suddenly broken off by a long silence. A quivering chill comes over the music. A dissonant note on the trumpets marks the fatal thrust. Quietly, without hope of redemption, the libertine dies.

Grand Concerto for Organ and Orchestra (2003)

STEPHEN PAULUS N 1949-2014)

Stephen Paulus, born in Summit, New Jersey in 1949 achieved notable success with performances of operas as well as works for orchestra, chorus, chamber ensembles and piano. As a composer for the stage, he was most closely associated with the Opera Theater of St. Louis, which commissioned and premiered *The Village Singer* (1979), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1982, based on James M. Cain’s novel) and *The Woodlanders* (1985, after Thomas Hardy). In September 1983, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* became the first American opera ever presented at the Edinburgh Festival, and has been produced numerous times. *Harmoonia*, an opera for children, was commissioned in 1991 by Des Moines Metro opera; *The Woman at Otowi Crossing* (based on the novel by Frank Waters) was premiered by the Opera Theater of St. Louis in June 1995; *Summer* (1999) is based on a novella by Edith Wharton; and the “church opera” *The Three Hermits* (1997) was inspired by a story of Tolstoy. His final opera was *Heloise and Abelard*, premiered at the Juilliard School in New York in April 2002. Paulus received commissions from such noted ensembles and performers as the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Thomas Hampson, Doc Severinsen, Evelyn Lear, Leo Kottke and Robert McDuffie. He was also known as a conductor of his own compositions and as a guest composer with major musical ensembles and at colleges and universities. Paulus served as Composer-in-Residence with the orchestras of Atlanta, Minnesota, Tucson and Annapolis, and as Resident Composer at the Tanglewood, Santa Fe Chamber Music and Oregon Bach Festivals, and, in Britain, at the Aldeburgh and Edinburgh Festivals. He was a co-founder in 1973 of the Minnesota Composers Forum, and also a member of the Board of Directors of ASCAP and co-founder and Board Vice President of the American Composers Forum, the largest composer service organization in the world. Stephen Paulus received awards and fellowships from the NEA, Guggenheim Foundation and

ASCAP; his Violin Concerto No. 1 won Third Prize in the prestigious Kennedy Center Friedheim Awards in 1988. He died in 2014 in the Minneapolis suburb of Arden Hills following a stroke.

The Dallas International Organ Competition, held every three years at Southern Methodist University, was won in 2003 by Bradley Hunter Welch. Stephen Paulus was commissioned by Dallas Symphony to compose the Grand Concerto for Organ and Orchestra for the winner, and the work was premiered by them on April 1, 2004 at Meyerson Hall. Paulus wrote that its melodic materials are “sometimes in short strands and at other times in long arches [with] the interplay of different key juxtapositions and sometimes sudden changes or unusual combinations with rhythmic and kinetic energy in forward-moving phrases.

“The *Grand Concerto* is cast in three movements, titled *Vivacious and spirited, Austere; Foreboding and Jubilant*. The title was selected to indicate that the work employs full orchestra and some wide, sweeping gestures and melodic ideas. The movement titles are descriptive of the musical activity within each movement, with a wide array of mood shifts and great contrasts of texture.

“In the second movement, towards the end, a portion of the hymn tune *Come, Come Ye Saints* appears in the organ part. This is a tradition that I have incorporated into almost every organ work I have written, in honor of my father, who used to improvise on the same tune. In the Mormon musical liturgy, it is known as *All Is Well*, and is a tune that the great organist Alexander Schreiner used to improvise during Sunday-morning radio broadcasts from the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. Both my father and I listened to these broadcasts many times.

“In the final movement, after a brief orchestral opening, I give center stage to the organ with a large section of chords oscillating between the right and left hands. Over this is eventually woven a high melody in the violins based on the tune *Waly, Waly*, also known as *The Water Is Wide*.”

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78, “Organ” (1886)

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS ^N 1835-1921

“There goes the French Beethoven,” declared Charles Gounod to a friend as he pointed out Camille Saint-Saëns at the Paris premiere of the “Organ” Symphony. This was high praise, indeed, and not without foundation. Though the depths of expression Beethoven plumbed were never accessible to Saint-Saëns, both musicians largely devoted their lives to the great abstract forms of instrumental music — symphony, concerto, sonata — that are the most difficult to compose and the most rewarding to accomplish. This was no mean feat for Saint-Saëns.

The Paris in which Saint-Saëns grew up, studied and lived was enamored of the vacuous stage works of Meyerbeer, Offenbach and a host of lesser lights in which little attention was given to artistic merit, only to convention and entertainment. Berlioz tried to break this stranglehold of mediocrity, and earned for himself a reputation as an eccentric, albeit a talented one, whose works were thought unperformable, and probably best left to the pedantic Germans anyway. Saint-Saëns, with his love of Palestrina, Rameau, Beethoven, Liszt and, above all, Mozart, also determined not to be enticed into the *Opéra Comique* but to follow his calling toward a more noble art. To that end, he established with some like-minded colleagues the *Société Nationale de Musique* in 1871 to perform the serious concert works of French composers. The venture was a success, and it did much to give a heightened sense of artistic purpose to the best Gallic musicians.

Saint-Saëns produced a great deal of music to promote the ideals of the *Société Nationale de Musique*, including ten concertos and smaller works for solo instruments and orchestra, tone poems, orchestral suites and five symphonies, the second and third of which were unpublished for decades and discounted in the usual numbering of these works. The last of the symphonies, No. 3 in C minor, is his masterwork in the genre.

Of the work’s construction, Saint-Saëns wrote, “This Symphony is divided into two parts, though it includes practically the traditional four movements. The first, checked in development, serves as an introduction to the *Adagio*. In the same manner, the scherzo is connected with the finale.” Saint-Saëns clarified the division of the two parts by using the organ only in the second half of each: dark and rich in Part I, noble and uplifting in Part II. The entire work is unified by transformations of the main theme, heard in the strings at the beginning after a brief and mysterious introduction. In his “Organ” Symphony, Saint-Saëns combined the techniques of thematic transformation, elision of movements and richness of orchestration with a clarity of thought and grandeur of vision to create one of the masterpieces of French symphonic music.