

# SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

### Unmasking the Stars | October 5, 6, & 7, 2019

Program notes by Steven Ledbetter | [www.stevenledbetter.com](http://www.stevenledbetter.com)

#### ANNA CLYNE *Masquerade*



Anna Clyne was born in London on March 9, 1980, and currently resides in the United States. The first performance of *Masquerade*, commissioned by the BBC for the Last Night of the Proms in 2013, took place at the Royal Albert Hall on September 7, 2013; Marin Alsop conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The score calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani (plus tambourine), three percussionists playing bass drum, two suspended and two sizzle cymbals, castanets, three kazoos, side drum, two cowbells, crash cymbals, motor horn, whip, tom-tom, suspended cymbals (with brushes), ratchet, vibraslap, triangle and harp (with two guitar picks or plastic cards) and strings. Duration is about 6 minutes.

#### ABOUT THE MUSIC

Anna Clyne began composing before entering her teens. She studied music at the University of Edinburgh, graduating with honors, then continued with a master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music. She has attracted the attention of conductors, including Ricardo Muti at the Chicago Symphony, who chose her, along with Mason Bates, to be co-composers in residence in Chicago from 2010 to 2014.

After that, Marin Alsop invited her to be composer-in-residence at the Baltimore Symphony. Her work is highly picturesque, filled with color and energy, as *Masquerade* is from the first gesture, a rushing whirlwind of sound, suggesting a wildly diverse group of colorful people, possibly in disguise, so that they can behave with joyous disregard for polite behavior. For a few seconds the hullabaloo relaxes to bright, sweet charms, before the joyous madhouse begins again.

The composer provided the following commentary for the first performance:

*Masquerade* draws inspiration from the original mid-18th century promenade concerts held in London's pleasure gardens. As is true today, these concerts were a place where people from all walks of life mingled to enjoy a wide array of music. Other forms of entertainment ranged from the sedate to the salacious with acrobatics, exotic street entertainers, dancers, fireworks and masquerades. I am fascinated by the historic and sociological courtship between music and dance. Combined with costumes, masked guises and elaborate settings, masquerades created an exciting, yet controlled, sense of occasion and celebration. It is this that I wish to evoke in *Masquerade*.

The work derives its material from two melodies. For the main theme, I imagined a chorus welcoming the audience and inviting them into their imaginary world. The second theme, *Juice of Barley*, is an old English country dance melody and drinking song, which first appeared in John Playford's 1695 edition of *The English Dancing Master*.

# LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

## Piano Concerto No. 4



Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. The Fourth Piano Concerto was composed in 1805 and early 1806 (it was probably completed by spring, for the composer's brother offered it to a publisher on March 27). The first performance was a private one, in March 1807, in the home of Prince Lobkowitz, and the public premiere took place in Vienna on December 22, 1808, with the composer as soloist. In addition to the solo piano, the score calls for one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns and strings; two trumpets and timpani are added in the final movement.

Duration is about 34 minutes.

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

During the years immediately following the composition and private first performance of the Eroica Symphony, ideas for new compositions crowded the composer's sketchbooks, and he completed one important work after another in rapid succession—an opera, three piano sonatas, three concertos, three string quartets, the Fourth symphony and preliminary work on the Fifth. Truly a heady outpouring of extraordinary music—and among these, the Piano Concerto No. 4 is among the most original.

The very beginning is one of the most memorable of any concerto. Beethoven establishes the presence of the soloist at once—not with brilliant self-assertion (he was to do that in the Emperor concerto), but with gentle insinuation, a quiet phrase demanding an orchestral response. But the orchestra is both quiet and startling, seeming to come in an entirely unexpected key (though it quickly works back to the expected home base).

That remarkable opening is only the first of many fresh, surprising and treasurable ideas that Beethoven offers in the concerto. At the end of the first movement exposition, for example, the soloist works up to an extended trill, which from long conditioning, we expect will lead to a fortissimo orchestral close to the section. That close eventually comes, but not before the pianist coyly inserts a sweetly expressive version of a theme that is otherwise grand and overpowering. And immediately after that, an unexpected pitch (reiterating the ubiquitous rhythmic pattern which this concerto shares with the Fifth Symphony) marks the beginning of the development.

In some ways the middle movement is the biggest surprise of all. Winds are silent; piano and strings are strictly segregated. It seems to demand an explanation. In 1859 a critic, Adolph Bernhard Marx, proposed that Beethoven created this movement as the most thoroughgoing program music he ever wrote, to express the "power of song" by depicting the great singer Orpheus pleading with the Furies to allow him to pass to the netherworld to recover his wife Eurydice. Certainly the orchestral strings, with their perpetual unison and sharp staccatos throughout avoid any feeling of softness or even humanity, while the piano (as Orpheus) pleads with increasing urgency, finally overcoming the opposition of the strings sufficiently to end their hard unison, persuading them to melt into harmony.

The first movement opened with a harmonic surprise at the orchestra's entrance; the last movement plays similar games, first by seeming to start in the "wrong" key, by way of a link from the closing chord of the second movement. Beethoven uses this unexpected harmony to play many tricks during the course of the finale. Many of the thematic ideas grow from four tiny melodic and rhythmic figures contained in the rondo theme itself. Most of the movement rushes along at a great pace, but Beethoven also pauses sometimes for moments of delicate and even romantic coloring, then returns to the fundamental high spirits that close the concerto with some last prankish echoes.

## MATT BROWNE

### *How the Solar System was Won*



Matt Browne was born in 1988 and lives in New York. He composed *How the Solar System Was Won* in 2012. It was first performed by the University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Rodrigo Ruiz, on February 10, 2013. The score calls for three each of flutes (including piccolo), oboe (including English horn), clarinet (including E-flat clarinet), and bassoon (including contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets, three trombones (including bass trombone), harp, piano, timpani and three percussionists, and strings. Duration is about seven and a half minutes.

#### **ABOUT THE MUSIC**

Matt Browne earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado and his doctorate in composition at the University of Michigan, studying with Michael Daugherty, Kristin Kuster, Carter Pann, and Daniel Kellogg. On his website he quotes, favorably, the command from impresario Serge Diaghilev to Jean Cocteau: "Astonish me!" It suggests a goal that is surely met in his colorful and dramatic single-movement score that is, in part, a reaction to his favorite film, with a philosophical echo. *How the Solar System Was Won* offers a frequently-changing series of musical outbursts that suggest excitement, color and drama. In the note that he has written for the piece, he describes the various elements that went into his planning for it:

Commentary by Matt Browne:

"*How the Solar System Was Won*" was the working title of the Kubrick classic, 2001: A Space Odyssey, my favorite film. Using the title as an impetus, this piece is about three very different but related things: one astronomical, one musical, and one deeply personal.

The astronomical narrative is about how the solar system became what it is today through the chaotic mess of celestial mechanics and cosmic collisions. Over billions of years, various gasses, rocks, and other debris have interacted with each other in these ways to create this tentative orbital balance we have around us, still slowly (but consistently) changing. It is interesting that some of the most recognized astronomical objects (Saturn's rings, the asteroid belt, the moon) came as a direct result of a collision of some sort that has momentarily thrown off the balance that gravitational forces have been working so hard to create.

The second narrative deals with my use of musical grooves. I repeatedly set them up one by one for only a few bars at a time – just before the audience can be lulled into a comfortable, restful languor (much like an orbit) – and then quickly subvert them in chaotic and surprising ways to make something new and exciting – a musical version of Saturn's rings.

The final narrative is about how the most chaotic and devastating moments in our normally groove-filled lives are what contribute most to shaping our personalities, and help give us our own personal rings of Saturn.

# RICHARD STRAUSS

## *Also sprach Zarathustra*



Richard Strauss was born in Munich on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Bavaria, on September 8, 1949. He began the composition of *Also sprach Zarathustra* in Munich on February 4, 1896, and completed it on August 24. Strauss himself conducted the Municipal Orchestra of Frankfurt-am-Main in the first performance on November 27, 1896. The score calls for a large orchestra consisting of piccolo, three flutes (third doubling as second piccolo), three oboes, English horn, two clarinets plus E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two bass tubas, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, orchestral bells, a deep bell, two harps, organ and strings. Duration is about 33 minutes.

### **ABOUT THE MUSIC**

Surely no major philosopher has ever had a closer relationship to music and musicians than Friedrich Nietzsche, and no work of philosophy has inspired more musical compositions than his *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Nietzsche was an excellent pianist and an amateur composer as well, having turned out a fair number of choral works both sacred and secular, songs, and piano pieces by his thirtieth year.

But in addition to being drawn to some of the musical questions of the day, Nietzsche was also a source for music in others. His best-known essay, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1885), served as the basis for songs by Schoenberg, Delius, Medtner, and Taneyev, as well as larger works by Mahler (Third Symphony), Delius (A Mass of Life), and Strauss.

The essay has an unusually poetic text for a work of philosophy, loosely narrative in character, recording the (invented) sayings of Zarathustra (Zoroaster to the Greeks) covering all sorts of diverse topics; each section ends with the formula “*Also sprach Zarathustra*” (“Thus spoke Zarathustra”).

Strauss became acquainted with Nietzsche’s work while reading in preparation for his first opera, *Guntram*. What interested him most of all was the philosopher’s criticism of the established church and ultimately of all conventional religion. Strauss was the last composer who could be called an intellectual, but he made the courageous decision to attempt to deal with Nietzsche’s philosophical ruminations as a symphonic poem. He chose to emphasize one particular theme of the work; he said he wanted “to convey in music an idea of the evolution of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of development, religious as well as scientific.

Strauss conceived one enormous movement that has little in common with the traditional musical forms used in his earlier tone poems. He selected a limited number of section titles from Nietzsche’s work and arranged them in a way that made possible musical variety. The most important of the unifying musical ideas—it comes up again and again—is the use of two keys, C and B, whose tonic notes are as close together as they can be melodically, though harmonically they are very far apart, to represent the natural world on the one hand and the inquiring spirit of man on the other. Time and again these two tonalities will be heard in close succession—or, indeed, even simultaneously.

The opening of the tone poem is a magnificent evocation of the primeval sunrise, with an important three-note rising figure in the trumpets representing Nature and the most glorious possible cadence in C (alternating major and minor at first before closing solidly in the major). That trumpet theme is the single most important melodic motive of the work. Immediately there is a drastic change of mood to the section entitled *Von den Hinterweltlern* (“On the Afterworldly”), the most primitive state of man. Gloomy, insubstantial phrases soon introduce an important new theme (heard here in B minor) leaping up, *pizzicato*, in cellos and basses; this theme is used throughout to depict man’s inquiring mind. Strauss satirizes those inquiries that lead to religion by quoting the opening phrase of the plainsong *Credo* in the horns and moves into a lush passage of conventional sweetness for the strings divided into sixteen parts.

This leads into *Von der großen Sehnsucht* (“On the Great Longing”), to depict man’s yearning to move beyond ignorance and superstition. The section combines the B minor “inquiring mind” motive with the C major “nature” motive. A vigorous new figure rushes up from the depths of the orchestra, gradually overpowering everything else. With a harp glissando it sweeps into *Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften* (“Of Pleasures and Passions”). This section, in C minor, links man’s sensual life with Nature (through the key relationship). A passionate new theme followed by an important motive blared out by trombones and heard frequently thereafter, sometimes identified as the theme of “satiety.” *Das Grablied* (“The Tomb Song”), follows immediately in B minor and related keys.

It dies away into the depths as cellos and basses begin a passage in strict imitation labeled *Von der Wissenschaft* (“On Science”). What could be more scientific than a fugue? And this one begins with the notes of the Nature theme, in C, followed immediately by the three notes of the B-minor triad, then continuing to all the remaining pitches of the chromatic scale. The imitations work the tonality around to B minor again, and a new developmental section gets underway, climaxing in *Der Genesende* (“The Convalescent”) in which the themes lead up to a powerful C major triple-forte for full orchestra, breaking off into pregnant silence. The next chord? B minor, bringing in an extended new development of several of the major ideas, treated with extraordinary orchestral virtuosity.

This comes to an end in an utterly unexpected way—by turning into a Viennese waltz, and a waltz in C major at that! For this section Strauss borrows Nietzsche’s title *Das Tanzlied* (“The Dancing Song”). Here, for the very first time in Strauss’s life, he seems ready to take on his older namesakes, the other Strausses who were renowned as the waltz kings. And here, already, we can get more than a tiny glimpse of *Der Rosenkavalier*, still some sixteen years in the future. This waltz begins as an amiable and graceful dance with a theme based on the Nature motive, but it soon builds in energy and vehemence, as many of the earlier themes make their appearance, only to be destroyed in turn by the “satiety” motive, which takes over fiercely at the climax of the score (corresponding to a similar climax in the book), as a great bell tolls twelve times.

Strauss marks this passage in the score *Nachtwandlerlied* (“Night Wanderer’s Song”). The bell rings every four measures, ever more softly, as the music settles onto a chord of C major, only to slip, with magical effect, into a gentle, bright B major for the coda, in which the violins present a sweet theme representing “spiritual freedom.”

This luminous B is softly but insistently undercut by cellos and basses, pizzicato, with the rising three-note “Nature” motive, as if to say: Earth—the natural world—abides in spite of all. Four more times the upper instruments reiterate their chord of B, only to find that the bottom strings repeat the C with quiet obstinacy, finally bringing the work to an end.