

Season 2009-2010

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Thursday, December 17, at 7:00

Friday, December 18, at 7:00

Saturday, December 19, at 7:00

The Glorious Sound of Christmas

Danail Rachev Conductor

Erin Wall Soprano

Matthew Worth Baritone

Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia

Alan Harler Artistic Director

Mendelssohn/arr. Harris "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"

Mendelssohn *Verleih' uns Frieden*

First Philadelphia Orchestra performances

Adam/arr. Smith "O Holy Night"

Murray/arr. Harris "Away in a Manger"

Mendelssohn *Vom Himmel hoch*

I. Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her

II. Aria: Es ist der Herr Christ, unser Gott

III. Er bringt euch alle Seligkeit

IV. Aria: Sei willekomm, du edler Gast

V. Arioso: Das also hat gefallen dir

VI. Lob, Ehr sei Gott im höchsten Thron

First Philadelphia Orchestra performances

Intermission

Traditional/arr. Harris "Angels We Have Heard on High"

Humperdinck "Evening Prayer" and "Dream Pantomime," from *Hansel and Gretel*

Reger "Mariä Wiegenlied," Op. 76, No. 52

First Philadelphia Orchestra performances

Mozart "Alleluia," from *Exsultate, jubilate*, K. 165

Traditional/arr. Kay "Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly" (A Merrie Fugue)

Gruber/arr. Harris "Silent Night"

Schubert/arr. Harris "Ave Maria," D. 839

Mason/arr. Harris "Joy to the World"

Wade/arr. Harris "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

This program runs approximately 2 hours.

Danail Rachev is assistant conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra and music director of the Eugene Symphony. In his first season with Eugene, he conducts a cycle of the Beethoven piano concertos featuring soloists Gabriela Montero, Angela Hewitt, and Garrick Ohlsson.

During the 2009-10 season, Mr. Rachev makes his debuts with the London Philharmonic and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. In recent seasons he has made debuts with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony, the Porto Symphony, the Nashville Symphony, the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, and the Eastern Connecticut Symphony, as well as return engagements with the Baltimore Symphony, CityMusic Cleveland, and the Camerata Winds in Dallas, of which he is also artistic director. Mr. Rachev came to Philadelphia in the 2008-09 season from the Dallas Symphony, where he had been assistant conductor since the 2005-06 season, leading classical concerts, pops programs, and family concerts, as well as school and outreach programs.

From 2002 to 2005 Mr. Rachev served as conductor of the Juilliard PreCollege Symphony, and in the 2002-03 season he was the first ever conducting fellow of the New World Symphony, where he studied with, and worked alongside, Michael Tilson Thomas. Mr. Rachev's debut and subsequent appearances in numerous subscription, family, and chamber music concerts were met with consistent critical acclaim. In his native Bulgaria, he has worked with several ensembles including the Russe State Opera, where he led performances of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. During the summer of 2002, Mr. Rachev was chosen to participate in both the American Academy of Conducting at the Aspen Music Festival and the National Conducting Institute in Washington, D.C. The latter culminated in his debut with the National Symphony.

Mr. Rachev was born in Shumen, Bulgaria, and trained at the State Musical Academy in Sofia, where he received degrees in orchestral and choral conducting. He moved to the United States to study at the Peabody Conservatory on a full scholarship and graduated in 2001. His conducting teachers have included Gustav Meier, Mr. Tilson Thomas, Vassil Kazandjiev, David Zinman, and Leonard Slatkin. Mr. Rachev currently resides in Philadelphia with his wife, Elizabeth.

In the 2009-10 season, soprano Erin Wall makes her debuts with the Bavarian State Opera and the Vienna State Opera in the role of Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, in addition to appearing as the Countess in Strauss's *Capriccio* with Pacific Opera Victoria and the four heroines in Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann* with Santa Fe Opera. She returns to the San Francisco Symphony for performances of Robin Holloway's *Clarissa Sequence*, Mozart's "Bella mia fiamma," as well as Berg's *Lulu Suite*, followed by an engagement with the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Mahler's Symphony No. 8. Her future engagements include performances with Lyric Opera of Chicago and Vancouver Opera and her debut with the Canadian Opera Company. These current performances mark her Philadelphia Orchestra debut.

Ms. Wall's past seasons included her debuts with the Metropolitan Opera as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, La Scala as Helena in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Los Angeles Opera as Pamina in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, along with a return to Lyric Opera of Chicago as Konstanze in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Ms. Wall also appeared with the San Francisco Symphony in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Barber's *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*, and Mahler's Symphony No. 8, which was commercially recorded. Other concert engagements included a program of works by Fauré and Strauss with the Calgary Philharmonic and the role of Musetta in concert performances of Puccini's *La bohème* with the City of Birmingham Symphony.

Ms. Wall has received the 2004 ARIA Award, a 2004 Richard Tucker Career Grant, and a 2002 Sara Tucker Study Grant. She also represented Canada in the finals of the 2003 BBC Singer of the World in Cardiff Competition, and she has received awards from the Dallas Opera Career Grant Competition, the George London Foundation, the MacAllister Awards, the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and Florida Grand Opera's Young Artists' Competition.

Born to American parents in Calgary, Alberta, Ms. Wall studied piano at the Vancouver Academy of Music throughout her childhood. She holds music degrees from Western Washington University and Rice University. She also attended the Aspen Music Festival and the Music Academy of the West.

Baritone Matthew Worth's engagements this season include the role of Charlie in Jake Heggie's *Three Decembers* at Chicago Opera Theater, Mercutio in Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* with New Orleans Opera, the title role in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with Virginia Opera, Jupiter in Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* with Central City Opera, Handel's *Messiah* at the University of Richmond, a concert performance of Ricky Ian Gordon's *The Grapes of Wrath* with New York's Collegiate Chorale, and Brahms's *A German Requiem* with the Atlanta Symphony. He is making his Philadelphia Orchestra debut with these current performances.

In the 2008-09 season Mr. Worth sang the title role in Britten's *Owen Wingrave* at Chicago Opera Theater, Silvio in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* with the Opera Company of North Carolina, Belcore in Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* with Opera Grand Rapids, Danilo in Léhar's *The Merry Widow* with Dayton Opera, and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* with Syracuse Opera; he also joined the roster of the Metropolitan Opera. Mr. Worth's other recent appearances include a return to the Chateaufville Foundation to sing Tarquinius in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* under conductor Lorin Maazel; performances of Orff's *Carmina burana* and excerpts from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* with the Atlanta Symphony under Robert Spano; and the title role of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* at the Chautauqua Institution.

Mr. Worth's career highlights include originating roles in two different world premieres: William Shrike in Lowell Liebermann's *Miss Lonelyhearts* with the Juilliard Opera Center and the Coachman in Stephen Hartke's *The Greater Good* at Glimmerglass Opera (which was also recorded for the Naxos label). He made his Carnegie Hall debut in *A German Requiem* under James DePriest and his Alice Tully Hall debut in *Carmina burana* with the Richmond Choral Society. He has also performed with pianist Brian Zeger at Zankel Hall. Mr. Worth was previously a member of the Juilliard Opera Center and a fellow of the Tanglewood Music Center.

Mr. Worth was the winner of the 2008 Connecticut Opera Competition and a recipient of a 2007 Sullivan Grant, a 2006 Richard F. Gold Grant from the Shoshana Foundation, the 2006 DeRosa Career Grant, a 2006 grant from the Julian Autrey Song Foundation, the 2005 Roy Jesson Prize for Outstanding Alumni from the University of Richmond, and a 2005 Encouragement Grant from the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation. He was also a finalist in the 2005 Liederkrantz Foundation Vocal Competition.

Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, one of America's oldest musical ensembles, is performing in its 136th consecutive season. The ensemble began in 1874 as an eight-voice male chorus founded by William Wallace Gilchrist, one of the most important musical figures in 19th-century Philadelphia. The chorus rapidly expanded and was able to provide more than 300 singers for the 1916 American premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony with The Philadelphia Orchestra under the direction of Leopold Stokowski. Since then Mendelssohn Club has earned a prestigious reputation by giving the first performance outside the Soviet Union of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 13 and the Philadelphia premieres of Brahms's *A German Requiem*, Prokofiev's *Ivan the Terrible*, Scriabin's Symphony No. 1, Bartók's *Cantata profana*, and the full orchestral version of Britten's *War Requiem*, among many others.

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Alan Harler, the 140-voice Mendelssohn Club is known for its professional productions of choral/orchestral programs. Mr. Harler's innovative programs often combine new or rarely heard works with more traditional pieces in order to enhance the presentation of each. A strong advocate for new music, Mr. Harler and the Mendelssohn Club have commissioned and premiered 44 new works since 1990, earning the ensemble an ASCAP/Chorus America Award for Adventurous Programming. Mendelssohn Club also explores interdisciplinary concert presentations, which have included collaborations with the Leah Stein Dance Company in productions of Orff's *Carmina burana*; *Urban ECHO: Circle Told*, featuring an improvisational vocal score by Pauline Oliveros and choreography for the entire chorus by Ms. Stein; and *battle hymns*, with a score by David Lang and choreography for the full chorus and nine professional dancers.

Alan Harler became Mendelssohn Club's 12th music director in 1988 and was named artistic director in 2009. He also serves as the Laura H. Carnell Professor and chairman of choral music at Temple University's Esther Boyer College of Music. He currently serves as a conducting mentor with the Conductors Guild. This past season he was honored with Chorus America's prestigious Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Art, and the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia's Honorary Lifetime Membership for a Distinguished Contribution to the Musical Life of Philadelphia.

Verleih' uns Frieden and Vom Himmel hoch

Felix Mendelssohn

Born in Hamburg, February 3, 1809

Died in Leipzig, November 4, 1847

Felix Mendelssohn was born to an upper-middle class household in Hamburg, Germany. The family moved to Berlin in 1811, where his father, Abraham, cultivated intellectual and musical friends. Both Felix and his sister, Fanny, were recognized very early on as musical prodigies. Felix made his concert debut at age 9, and between the ages of 12 and 14 composed a dozen string symphonies that instantly became an important part of the repertoire.

The 1820s were seething with Romanticism, but Mendelssohn's inclinations were decidedly more Classical, and he earned an early reputation for conservatism that doesn't always do his music justice. While it's true that Mendelssohn looked to composers of the past for inspiration, and that form was for him a more central concern than for Chopin or Liszt, Mendelssohn, within the relative confines of Classical form, drew from a deep, expressive well. One of his constant sources of inspiration was religion. Though he is known today primarily for symphonic and chamber scores, sacred choral music was a large part of his output.

In 1829 Felix, age 20, conducted a monumental revival of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, the first performance of that work after Bach's own time. The sacred Protestant music of Bach resonated with young Mendelssohn, whose father had converted the family from Judaism. The following year, Mendelssohn composed his Christmas cantata, *Vom Himmel hoch* (From Heaven Above), based on the eponymous hymn by Protestantism's founding theologian, Martin Luther.

Though only 21 years old, Mendelssohn was already a composer of maturity and accomplishment. He had written the astounding Octet for Strings at age 16, and the enormously popular Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a year later. In *Vom Himmel hoch* he emulates Bach's style in such features as the Baroque-like counterpoint, and the use of the titular hymn tune in all three choral movements. In the three movements for solo singers, however, Mendelssohn moved more in the direction of pure melody, of the sort that distinguishes his "Italian" Symphony and Violin Concerto. While writing *Vom Himmel hoch*, Mendelssohn simultaneously sketched what would become his "Reformation" Symphony, a work that also uses one of Luther's hymns prominently ("A Mighty Fortress is Our God").

Mendelssohn's journey to Italy in 1831 prompted more religious music. In Rome he visited the church where Luther had lived as an Augustinian monk before announcing himself as a Reformer. Mendelssohn attended Catholic service and perhaps was struck by the similarity of the Latin mass's *Dona nobis pacem* (Give us peace) and Luther's prayer for peace, *Verleih' uns Frieden*. He set the prayer simply and directly for chorus and orchestra. The opening dialogue in the cellos sets the stage for low strings to accompany the first verse. High strings and winds are added to successive verses, forming an ever-more-intense build from quiet plea to urgent demand.

—Kenneth LaFave

Verleih' uns Frieden

(Martin Luther)

Grant us peace mercifully,
Lord God, throughout our times!
For there is indeed no other
that for us can fight,
but you, our God, alone.

English translation by Darrin T. Britting

Vom Himmel hoch

(Martin Luther)

I. Chorus

From heaven above to earth I come,
To bear good news to every home.
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
Whereof I now will say and sing:

To you this night is born a child
Of Mary, chosen mother mild;
This little child, of lowly birth,
Shall be the joy of all your earth.

II. Aria (Baritone)

'Tis Christ our God who far from high
Hath heard your sad and bitter cry;
Himself will your Salvation be,
Himself from sin will make you free.

He brings those blessings, long ago
Prepared by God for all below.

III. Chorus

He brings those blessings, long ago
Prepared by God for all below.
Henceforth His kingdom open stands
To you, as to the angel bands.

IV. Aria (Soprano)

Welcome to earth, Thou noble guest,
Through whom e'en wicked men are blest!
Thou com'st to share our misery,
What can we render, Lord, to Thee!

Were earth a thousand times as fair,
Beset with gold and jewels rare,
She yet were far too poor to be
A narrow cradle, Lord, for Thee.

V. Arioso (Baritone)

Thus hath it pleas'd Thee to make plain
The truth to us poor fools and vain,
That this world's honour, wealth and might
Are nought and worthless in Thy sight.

VI. Chorus

Glory to God in highest Heaven
Who unto man His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad New Year to all the earth.

English translation by Catherine Winkworth

“Evening Prayer” and “Dream Pantomime,” from *Hansel and Gretel*

Engelbert Humperdinck

Born in Sieburg, September 1, 1854

Died in Neustrelitz, September 27, 1921

German composer Engelbert Humperdinck is known for two things: his 1893 opera *Hansel and Gretel*, and his name. The name became an aspect of pop culture in the 1960s when English-born lounge singer Arnold George Dorsey adapted it as his stage name. The opera, the first among many Humperdinck composed in a long career, is the sole work for which the prolific composer is now known.

It may be hard to hear in the folk-inspired melodies of *Hansel and Gretel*, but Humperdinck was a Wagnerian, through and through. After studying piano as a child, the young Humperdinck fell in love with opera and determined to compose exclusively for that medium. After studying at the Conservatory of Cologne in 1872, and following the receipt of many awards, including prizes named after Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Meyerbeer, Humperdinck visited Richard Wagner in 1880 during a trip to Italy. Their dialogue was decisive for the younger composer, who accepted the master's invitation to come to Bayreuth the following year and assist in the premiere production of Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*. Humperdinck accepted the invitation even though, as he himself admitted, his own talents were more restrained and Classical than the roiling Romanticism of Wagner.

Wagner's influence may have temporarily hobbled Humperdinck, for after assisting in *Parsifal* the composer went through a period of relative barrenness. He worked as a teacher and a critic, but plans for operas went unrealized. In 1891 Humperdinck's sister, Adelheid Wette, asked him to set some folksongs for her stage adaptation of *Hansel and Gretel*. The project served as a re-set for the composer, who turned away from the clenched chromaticism of Wagnerism to the simplicity of folksong. The endeavor quickly grew from a few folksong settings to an original score for a *singspiel* (a type of German opera that featured songs and spoken interludes). Finally *Hansel and Gretel* underwent a final transformation to full-scale grand opera.

Hansel and Gretel premiered December 23, 1893, in Weimar. The production was conducted by no less than Richard Strauss, who pronounced the work a masterpiece. Humperdinck had good luck with conductors: The opera's second production came in September 1894 in Hamburg, under the baton of Gustav Mahler. Productions quickly followed in London in December 1894, and in New York a year later. Within a few years *Hansel and Gretel* had been performed around the globe and its popularity has not waned a bit in the decades since. The opera has no textual link to Christmas, but the tradition of producing it at Christmastime has come down to us from the first performances.

Various numbers are regularly excerpted from *Hansel and Gretel*, none more frequently than the “Evening Prayer,” which finds brother and sister trusting God to send 14 angels to protect them. In the consequent “Dream Pantomime,” 28 angels (14 for each child) do come forth. Humperdinck struck a balance in this score between the folksong-like tunes of the singing parts—the “Evening Prayer” could be an actual hymn—and the Wagnerian

complexity of the orchestral sections, such as the “Dream Pantomime.” This brought both sides of his composing personality together in an effective dramatic mélange.

Humperdinck tried for the rest of his life to duplicate the success of his first opera, but to no avail. For the most part, he stuck to fairy tales for inspiration, including an opera based on Sleeping Beauty and another called *Königskinder*, the plot of which closely resembles that of *Hansel and Gretel*, but with a tragic ending.

—Kenneth LaFave

"Mariä Wiegenlied"

Max Reger

Born in Brand, Bavaria, March 19, 1873

Died in Leipzig, May 11, 1916

"Mariä Wiegenlied"

(Martin Boelitz)

Mary sits in the rose grove
and rocks her child Jesus;
gently through the leaves
blows a warm summer wind.

At her feet sings
a colorful little bird:
Sleep, little child, my sweet,
fall asleep now!

Lovely is your smile,
more lovely your joy in slumber,
lay your tired little head
firmly against your mother's breast!

Sleep, little child, my sweet,
fall asleep now!

English translation by Darrin T. Britting

“Alleluia,” from *Exsultate, jubilate*

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

Born in Salzburg, January 27, 1756

Died in Vienna, December 5, 1791

Mozart's lifelong bent was to write for the theater. The theater, he said, was the composer's ultimate place of expression, in which character and melody met and created a world. When he reached the age of 30, the amount of time he spent writing operas began to increase over that spent on chamber music or symphonies. In the last six months of his life, Mozart composed two full-scale operas of contrasting types: the serious, *La clemenza di Tito*, and the mystic-comic, *The Magic Flute*.

This love for dramatic music colored all the scores Mozart penned, especially sacred vocal works. *Exsultate, jubilate* was composed just days before Mozart's 16th birthday, and already it contains the seeds of deepening maturity. It was written for one of the last great castratos, Venanzio Rauzzini, for whom he had just composed the title role in his opera *Lucio Silla*. Because it is a Latin hymn to the Virgin Mary, *Exsultate, jubilate* is a motet. But in spirit and even in form, it resembles Mozart's operas. The “Alleluia” brings the work to a jubilant close.

—Kenneth LaFave

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