

# Notes for Classics 10: Eckart's Farewell

Saturday, May 4 and Sunday, May 5

Eckart Preu, Conductor — Nebojša Jovan Živković, Percussion

## Joseph Bologne Chevalier de Saint-Georges Overture to *L'amant anonyme* (The Anonymous Lover)

### THE VITAL STATS

**Composer:** born December 25, 1745, Baillif, Guadeloupe; died June 10, 1799, Paris.

**Work composed:** undocumented; c. late 1770s.

**World premiere:** The complete opera *L'amant anonyme* was first performed on March 8, 1780. The overture, also known as Bologne's Symphony Op. 11 No. 2, was first performed as a stand-alone work on March 28, 1782, at the Concert Spirituel in Paris.

**Instrumentation:** 2 oboes, 2 horns, and strings.

**Estimated duration:** 12 minutes

The life story of Joseph Bologne Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges would make a compelling biopic. The son of a French planter and an African slave on the island of Guadeloupe, Bologne came to Paris at the age of seven to begin his formal education. Six years later, he enrolled in a school run by Europe's most famous fencing teacher, Tessier de La Boëssière, and by age 17 he had become an expert fencer. After Bologne graduated from La Boëssière's academy, the French court made him a knight (chevalier) and a member of the King's personal bodyguard. Bologne also gained a reputation for his amorous pursuits.

A virtuoso violinist, Bologne joined François-Joseph Gossec's orchestra, Le Concert des Amateurs, in 1769, and took over its leadership in 1773. Under Bologne's baton, Les Amateurs grew into one of Europe's finest orchestras. Bologne's second orchestra, Le Concert de la Loge Olympique, enjoyed an equally stellar reputation as the commissioning body for Joseph Haydn's "Paris" Symphonies. In 1776, Bologne failed to become the director of the Paris Opéra, after campaign to install him was blocked by several leading divas; these ladies begged Marie Antoinette to save them from "degrading their honour and delicate conscience by having them submit to the orders of a mulatto." Madame de Montesson, wife of the Duke of Orléans, offered Bologne the music directorship of her private theatre, where Bologne's opera *L'amant anonyme*, premiered in 1780.

During the French Revolution, Bologne was made colonel of the "Légion nationale des Américains & du midi." St. Georges' Légion, as it was known, became the first regiment in Europe composed of "free men of color." As The Terror raged, Bologne was imprisoned and narrowly avoided the guillotine; after he was stripped of his French military rank, he sailed to Saint-Domingue (Haiti) to assist the slave rebellion there. Within two weeks of his return to Paris, Bologne busied himself forming yet another orchestra. Just before his death, he wrote, "Towards the end of my life, I was particularly devoted to my violin."

## Nebojša Jovan Živković

### Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra No. 1, Op. 28, “Concerto of the Mad Queen”

#### THE VITAL STATS

**Composer:** born July 5, 1962, Sremska Mitrovica, Yugoslavia.

**Work composed:** 1999-2000, *rev.* 2003. Commissioned by and dedicated to “my good friend and colleague Evelyn Glennie.”

**World premiere:** Glennie and the Northern Sinfonia gave the premiere on February 7, 2000 in Reading, England.

#### INSTRUMENTATION

**Solo Percussion:** bass drum with pedal, 2 Chinese cymbals, 2 Chinese opera gongs, cymbals, 5 earth plates, low cowbell, 2 plastic blocks, 5 tom-toms, tam-tam, 7 uchiwa-daikos, and vibraphone.

**Orchestra:** piccolo, 2 flutes, 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

**Estimated duration:** 18 minutes

Hailed by critics as a percussion “wizard,” percussionist and composer Nebojša Jovan Živković (Ne-BOY-sha YO-van CHIV-kovich) possesses fiery energy, dazzling precision, and a knack for introducing new sounds to audiences around the world through his performances and compositions. He combines a demanding concert schedule with his teaching duties at the Music and Arts Private University of the City of Vienna, where he has been a professor since 2012.

“My intention was to write an expressive and energetic piece in which the soloist treats all the percussion instruments as if they were one single instrument, as with an organ,” Živković explains in his comments for *Concerto of the Mad Queen*. “Therefore I often use different sounds and combinations simultaneously, always trying to make a kind of ‘mad sound catalogue’ ... that I would call ‘royal fantasies.’ There are different patchwork-like episodes, which are the pictures of the fantasy and imagination of the Mad Queen.

“... Listeners will clearly hear the fanfares of the castle guard at the beginning; the Queen enters the scene by interrupting the trumpets with her hysterical solo on the uchiwa daikos (a Japanese drum shaped like a round fan, whose head is stretched around a metal frame) and earth plates, accompanied only by the orchestral percussion on ‘trash-like’ instruments ... After almost four minutes of wild anger, and repeated screams in the horns, she suddenly enters the quiet, calm chambers of the castle (tender theme on the vibraphone) ... After a while she is back to the wild driving strettas, with a permanent pulse in the bass drum. The piece ends with enormously virtuosic, energetic drumming over a long sustained chorale in the brasses.

“Percussive instruments can develop an enormous energy on stage,” Živković continues. “That is also the reason why the orchestra from time to time seems to be in the shade of the queen’s part. Owing to the inspirational playing of Evelyn Glennie (co-commissioner of the piece), and knowing also from my own experience that too-strictly-written-down music for percussion can actually hinder the ‘free floating of strokes,’ I have left enough space in the solo part where the soloist is free to actually improvise.”

## Richard Strauss

### Eine Alpensinfonie, TrV 233, Op. 64, “Alpine Symphony”

#### THE VITAL STATS

**Composer:** born June 11, 1864, Munich; died September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

**Work composed:** 1911-15. Strauss completed the orchestration on February 8, 1915. The work is dedicated “To Graf von Seebach and the Dresden Hofkapelle.”

**World premiere:** Strauss led the Dresden Hofkapelle on October 28, 1915, at the Berlin Philharmonie.

**Instrumentation Onstage:** 4 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), heckelphone, 4 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 4 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 4 Wagner tubas, (all 4 doubling horn), 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, 2 tubas, 2 sets of timpani, bass drum, cowbells, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, tam-tam, thunder machine, triangle, wind machine, organ, celeste, 2 harps, and strings. **Offstage brasses:** 12 horns, 2 trumpets, and 2 trombones.

**Estimated duration:** 52 minutes

Richard Strauss finished his first tone poem, *Don Juan*, in 1888. This richly orchestrated, highly descriptive work heralded the 24-year-old composer as a new voice, one particularly attuned to the musical possibilities of symphonic music. Over the next 25 years, Strauss wrote seven more tone poems; their subjects ranged from the colorful tales of *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Don Quixote* to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (*Also sprach Zarathustra*) and semi-autobiographical explorations (*Symphonia Domestica*).

One of the creative impulses that inspired *Eine Alpensinfonie*, Strauss’ final tone poem, can be traced back to the composer’s teen years. In 1879, Strauss, then 15, survived a harrowing encounter while hiking in the mountains of Bavaria. On August 26 of that year, Strauss detailed the experience in a letter:

“Recently we made a great hiking party to the top of the Heimgarten, on which day we walked for twelve hours. At two in the morning we rode on a handcart to the village, which lies at the foot of the mountain. Then we climbed by the light of lanterns in pitch-dark night and arrived at the peak after a five-hour march. There one has a splendid view. Then we hiked down the other side to Lake Walchensee, but we took a wrong trail and had to climb around in the midday heat for three hours with no path ... Lake Walchensee is a beautiful lake, but makes a melancholy impression since it is enclosed by forests and high mountains. . . . [On the way from there to Lake Kochelsee] a terrible thunderstorm overtook us, which uprooted trees and threw stones in our faces. We hardly had time to find a dry spot before the storm broke. Lake Kochelsee, a very romantic and beautiful lake, made huge waves so that it was impossible to even think about crossing it. After the storm had passed we had to settle for walking all the way around the lake, whether we wanted to or not. On the way the rain came again and that is how we arrived in Schlehdorf, after a breakneck march (we did not rest for a single moment)—tired, soaked to the skin—and spent the night; then the next morning we rode as calm as could be in the hay wagon to Murnau. The hike was interesting, unusual, and original in the highest degree ... the next day I described the whole hike on the piano. Naturally huge tone paintings and smarminess la Wagner.”

Over the years between this youthful adventure and the completion of *Eine Alpensinfonie*, Strauss considered and discarded other ideas; at one point, he thought of basing the work on Nietzsche’s 1888 essay *Der Antichrist*. Ultimately, *Eine Alpensinfonie* is what its title suggests: a celebration of nature, as experienced in a 24-hour period beginning at dawn in the mountains. The narrative describes the sights and sounds a hiker on a mountain trail would encounter along the way in 22 distinct episodes that Strauss noted

in the score. Some of these include: a magnificent sunrise, alpine meadows full of wildflowers, a waterfall, a steep stretch of trail, a dark forest, glaciers, dangerous sections of the hike, reaching the summit, sunset, a storm and its aftermath, and finally night descending as the weary hiker returns home. The linear nature of this musical journey also works metaphorically, recalling Strauss' earlier philosophical explorations of life and the nature of existence.

The orchestral forces in *Eine Alpensinfonie* are colossal, requiring approximately 130 players. In addition to expanded strings, the wind and brass sections are enhanced by four Wagner tubas and a heckelphone, a baritone oboe used almost exclusively by Strauss, and the percussion section includes thunder and wind machines, as well as Swiss cowbells.

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