Signature Series
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Friday, March 22, 2019 at 8 pm
Dr. Bobbie Bailey & Family Performance Center, Morgan Hall
Sixty-ninth Concert of the 2018-19 Concert Season

PETER OUNDJIAN
Conductor

BENJAMIN GROSVENOR
Piano

Photo Credit: Patrick Allen/Opera Omnia
JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in D minor, opus 15 (1861)

I. Maestoso
II. Adagio
III. Rondo. Allegro non troppo

Benjamin Grosvenor, piano

INTERMISSION

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)

Also sprach Zarathustra, opus 30 (1896)

I. Sunrise (Sonnenaufgang)
II. Of the Backworldsman (Von den Hinterweltlern)
III. Of the Great Longing (Von der grossen Sehnsucht)
IV. Of Joys and Passions (Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften)
V. Song of the Grave (Das Grablied)
VI. Of Science (Von der Wissenschaft)
VII. The Convalescent (Der Genesende)
VIII. The Dance Song (Das Tanzlied)
IX. Night Wanderer’s Song (Das Nachwandlerlied)
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in D minor, opus 15 (1861)

**Johannes Brahms** was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833 and died in Vienna, Austria, on April 3, 1897. The first performance of the D-minor Piano Concerto took place on January 22, 1859, in Hanover, Germany, with the composer as soloist and Joseph Joachim conducting. In addition to the solo piano, the D-minor Concerto is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

“Like Minerva from the head of Kronion”

On September 30, 1853, a shy 20-year-old Johannes Brahms appeared at the Düsseldorf home of Robert and Clara Schumann. Brahms, who greatly admired Robert Schumann, hoped that the senior and influential composer would assist his own budding musical career.

Brahms played some of his piano compositions for Robert and Clara, both of whom were immediately impressed by the young man’s extraordinary talent. During the following month, Brahms visited the Schumanns on an almost daily basis. Then, on October 28, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* published an article by Schumann, entitled “Neue Bahnen” (“New Paths”), in which the author wrote:

> I thought….someone would and must appear, fated to give us the ideal expression of the times, one who would not gain his mastery by gradual stages, but rather would spring fully armed like Minerva from the head of Kronion. And he has come, a young blood at whose cradle graces and heroes mounted guard. His name is Johannes Brahms, from Hamburg, where he has been creating in obscure silence...

> When he waves his magic wand and the power of great orchestral and choral forces will aid him, then we shall be shown still more the wonderful glimpses into the secrets of the spirit-world. May the highest genius strengthen him for this...His contemporaries salute him on his first journey through the world where wounds may await him, but also palms and laurels; we welcome him as a powerful fighter…

The suggestion that Brahms should focus his talents on symphonic repertoire became even more emphatic a few months later, when Schumann wrote to the eminent violinist, Joseph Joachim: “Is he flying high—or only
amongst flowers? Is he putting drums and trumpets to work yet? He must remember the beginnings of the Beethoven symphonies; he must try to do something of the kind. The point is to make a beginning, then the end comes of itself.”

On February 27, 1854, Schumann, plagued by hallucinations, plunged into the Rhine. After his suicide attempt, Schumann was admitted to an asylum in Endenich, where he remained until his death at the age of 46, on July 29, 1856.

Brahms, fearful of the inevitable comparisons with Beethoven, did not complete his First Symphony until 1876, almost a quarter-century after the “New Paths” article. However, shortly after Schumann’s attempted suicide, Brahms endeavored to fulfill his mentor’s grand expectations. In March of 1854, Brahms began to compose a large-scale sonata for two pianos. Brahms then attempted to convert this work into a symphony, orchestrating (with the aid of Joachim and composer Julius Grimm) the sonata’s opening movement. Brahms was dissatisfied with the results.

After Schumann’s death, Brahms decided to convert the first movement of his proposed symphony into a piano concerto (other music from the uncompleted symphony later became part of the 1868 *German Requiem*). Brahms reworked the symphony’s Maestoso opening movement, and composed a new *Adagio* and *Rondo* finale. Brahms completed the score of his First Piano Concerto in March of 1858, although he continued to revise the work almost until the moment of its first performance.

“A brilliant and decisive—failure”

Brahms was the soloist, and Joachim the conductor, in the January 22, 1859 Hanover premiere. The audience reception was rather cool, but that proved to be far preferable to the reaction five days later at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. Julius Rietz conducted and Brahms was again the soloist. The audience, confused by the Concerto’s epic length and implacable, stormy character, voiced its disapproval. Edward Bernsdorf, critic for the *Signale*, characterized the work as “a composition dragged to its grave...for more than three quarters of an hour one must endure this rooting and rummaging, this straining and tugging, this tearing and patching of phrases and flourishes!”

The following day, Brahms wrote to Joachim:

My Concerto has had here a brilliant and decisive—failure...At the conclusion three pairs of hands were brought together very slowly,
whereupon a perfectly distinct hissing from all sides forbade any such demonstration...In spite of everything, the Concerto will meet with approval when I have improved its form and the next one will be quite different.
I believe this is the best thing that can happen to one; it forces one to concentrate one’s thoughts and increases one’s courage. After all, I am only experimenting and feeling my way as yet. But the hissing was too much of a good thing, wasn’t it?

Brahms did revise his First Piano Concerto, and the score was published in 1861. The composer received his vindication four years later, when he played the Concerto at a triumphant Mannheim concert, led by Hermann Levi. Since that time, the eminence of this challenging, magnificent work has remained secure.

Musical Analysis

I. Maestoso
The Concerto opens with an orchestral introduction. The stormy principal theme, initially played by the first violins and cellos over thundering timpani, reflects, according to Joachim, Brahms’s despair upon learning of Schumann’s attempted suicide. The soloist enters, quietly at first, but soon reprises the storm with which the Concerto began. The piano offers an unaccompanied presentation of a noble, espressivo melody. A series of fortissimo octaves by the soloist initiates the development section. It is the soloist who launches the recapitulation of the movement’s tempestuous opening. The coda, again initiated by the soloist, begins softly, but soon reaches its furious climax.

II. Adagio
When Brahms first composed the opening melody of the Adagio, he wrote over it the words, “Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini” (“Blessed is he who has come in the name of the master”), in all likelihood a reference to Schumann, whom the younger composer often called “Mynheer Domini.” But it should also be noted that on December 30, 1856, Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann, “I am painting a lovely portrait of you. It is to be the Adagio.”

The Adagio is in A—B—A form. The violins and violas play the serene, principal melody, to which the soloist soon responds. The central episode is slightly more agitated, but the opening section returns, and, after a fully-composed cadenza for the soloist, the Adagio ends in hushed reverence.
III. *Rondo. Allegro non troppo*

The soloist immediately presents the vigorous principal theme of the Rondo finale. All of the various contrasting sections are ingeniously derived from that main theme. The closing pages feature two fully-transcribed cadenzas. A solo horn heralds the thrilling conclusion of the Brahms D-minor Piano Concerto.

*Also sprach Zarathustra, Opus 30 (1896)*

**Richard Strauss** was born in Munich, Germany, on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, on September 8, 1949. The first performance of *Also sprach Zarathustra* took place in Frankfurt, Germany, on November 27, 1896, with the composer conducting the Museums-Orchester of Frankfurt-am-Main. *Also sprach Zarathustra* is scored for two piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two tubas, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, orchestra bells, suspended cymbal, chime in E, two harps, organ, and strings.

During the years 1895-97, Richard Strauss composed three orchestral tone poems based upon famous literary characters. The first, *Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks* (1895), is a rollicking tour-de-force depicting the exploits of the medieval joker. The last, *Don Quixote* (1897), is a witty and often affecting musical portrayal of the misadventures of Cervantes’s beloved “Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance.” Strauss’s inspiration for the middle work in this trilogy was of a far different nature—Friedrich Nietzsche’s epic philosophic poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spake Zarathustra) (1883-5).

“My homage to the genius of Nietzsche”

The protagonist in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is based upon the ancient Persian prophet, also known as Zoroaster. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the prophet leaves the solitude of his mountain refuge to share his wisdom with mankind. During the course of the poem, Nietzsche, in the person of Zarathustra, denounces the very foundations of society—organized religion, democracy, and civilization—he believes inhibit man’s ability to reach his greatest potential.

Strauss was first drawn to Nietzsche’s masterwork during the composer’s preparations for his opera *Guntrum* (1894). He began composition of the score on February 4, 1896, and completed the work on August 24 of that year. The composer led the Museums-Orchester of Frankfurt-am-Main in
the November 27, 1896 premiere. Prior to the first performance, Strauss provided this brief program:

First movement: Sunrise, Man feels the power of God. *Andante religioso.* But man still longs. He plunges into passion (second movement) and finds no peace. He turns toward science, and tries in vain to solve life’s problem in a fugue (third movement). Then agreeable dance tunes sound and he becomes an individual, and his soul soars upward while the world sinks far below him.

Nietzsche, an ardent music-lover and amateur composer, once remarked to his friend, Peter Gast, of *Also sprach Zarathustra*: “I almost believe it belongs among the symphonies.” Gustav Mahler quoted a portion of Zarathustra’s text in his Third Symphony (1896), as did Frederick Delius in *A Mass of Life* (1905).

By contrast, Strauss’s *Also sprach Zarathustra* is a purely orchestral representation of Nietzsche’s work. From the time of the premiere, commentators have attempted to find a direct relationship between the music of *Also sprach Zarathustra* and Nietzsche’s text. Strauss understood the difficulty, perhaps even futility, of attempting a musical depiction of Nietzsche’s philosophy. At the time of the tone poem’s December, 1896, Berlin premiere, Strauss confessed:

I did not intend to write philosophical music or portray Nietzsche’s great work musically. I meant rather 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, up to Nietzsche’s idea of the Superman. The whole symphonic poem is intended as my homage to the genius of Nietzsche, which found its greatest exemplification in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

### Musical Analysis

Strauss’s *Also sprach Zarathustra* opens with the famous “Sunrise” Introduction, followed by eight sections, performed without pause. Each has a title taken from a chapter in Nietzsche’s book.

I. *Sunrise (Sonnenaufgang)*

Over string bass tremolos, reinforced by the contrabassoon, organ and bass drum, the trumpets play a three-note ascending theme. The orchestra responds with fanfares and thunderous timpani attacks. This episode is twice repeated, with the organ concluding the glorious final statement.
II. Of the Backworldsman (Von den Hinterweltlern)
Strauss originally entitled this section Of the Divine (Von Göttlichen). Muted cellos and basses introduce another ascending theme that returns throughout the work. Muted horns intone a portion of the holy chant Credo in unum Deum (I believe in one God). A lovely melody for divided strings builds to a climax and then subsides. An ascending viola passage serves as a bridge to the following section.

III. Of the Great Longing (Von der grossen Sehnsucht)
This brief episode presents transformations of the ascending theme from the previous section and the “Sunrise” motif. The organ plays the opening of the Magnificat, while the horns reprise the Credo. A furious rush of activity leads to the next section.

IV. Of Joys and Passions (Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften)
A brief, tempestuous passage finally abates in the closing measures.

V. Song of the Grave (Das Grablied)—Echoes of the previous section combine with the “Sunrise” motif and the “Longing” theme.

VI. Of Science (Von der Wissenschaft)
The cellos and basses quietly inaugurate an extended orchestral fugue based upon the “Sunrise” motif. The severity of this episode is briefly interrupted before an agitated passage signals the fugue’s return in the following section.

VII. The Convalescent (Der Genesende)
The fugue subject is now violently transformed. The tension mounts until the orchestra erupts with a massive C-Major chord. A brief pause precedes a slow, mysterious interlude. Suddenly, there is a flurry of activity. Brass fanfares punctuate swirling wind and string figures.

VIII. The Dance Song (Das Tanzlied)
This section presents a waltz in the grand Viennese manner, showcasing a solo violin. The music grows to a voluptuous climax.

IX. Night Wanderer’s Song (Das Nachwandlerlied)
For the final episode, Strauss retained the original title of the parallel chapter in the book (Nietzsche ultimately changed it to The Drunken Song). The finale opens with a relentless tolling of the bell. The mood calms, leading to the lyrical final section. The closing bars present an eerie juxtaposition of the key of B in the higher-pitched instruments with the key of C in the cellos and double-basses, whose trio of pizzicato notes conclude Richard Strauss’s Also sprach Zarathustra.

– Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer
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Associate Principal

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‡ rotate between sections
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† Regularly engaged musician
• New this season
Peter Oundjian, conductor, a dynamic presence in the conducting world born in Toronto, is renowned for his probing musicality, collaborative spirit, and engaging personality. Oundjian's appointment as Music Director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) in 2004 reinvigorated the Orchestra with numerous recordings, tours, and acclaimed innovative programming as well as extensive audience growth, thereby significantly strengthening the ensemble’s presence in the world. In August 2014, he led the TSO on a tour of Europe, which included a sold-out performance at Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw and the first performance of a North American orchestra at Reykjavik’s Harpa Hall.

Oundjian was appointed Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO) in 2012. Under his baton, the orchestra has enjoyed several successful tours including one to China, and has continued its relationship with Chandos Records. This season, Oundjian and the RSNO opened the Edinburgh Festival with the innovative Harmonium Project to great critical and audience acclaim.

Few conductors bring such musicianship and engagement to the world’s great podiums – from Berlin, Amsterdam, and Tel Aviv, to New York, Chicago, and Sydney. He has also appeared at some of the great annual gatherings of music and music-lovers: from the BBC Proms and the Prague Spring Festival, to the Edinburgh Festival and The Philadelphia Orchestra’s Mozart Festival, where he was Artistic Director from 2003 to 2005.

Oundjian was Principal Guest Conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra from 2006 to 2010 and Artistic Director of the Caramoor International Music Festival in New York between 1997 and 2007. Since 1981, he has been a visiting professor at the Yale School of Music, and was awarded the university’s Sanford Medal for distinguished service to music in 2013.
Benjamin Grosvenor, pianist is internationally recognized for his electrifying performances and insightful interpretations. His virtuosic command over the most strenuous technical complexities underpins the remarkable depth and understanding of his musicianship. Benjamin is renowned for his distinctive sound, described as ‘poetic and gently ironic, brilliant yet clear-minded, intelligent but not without humour, all translated through a beautifully clear and singing touch’ (The Independent), and making him one of the most sought-after young pianists in the world.

Benjamin first came to prominence as the outstanding winner of the Keyboard Final of the 2004 BBC Young Musician Competition at the age of eleven, and he was invited to perform with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the First Night of the 2011 BBC Proms at just nineteen. Since then, he has become an internationally regarded pianist and was announced in 2016 as the inaugural recipient of The Ronnie and Lawrence Ackman Classical Piano Prize with the New York Philharmonic. As part of this he returns to New York in April 2018, performing Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 3 under the baton of Esa-Pekka Salonen as well as chamber music with members of the orchestra at the Tisch Center for the Arts at 92nd Street Y.

Recent and future highlights include engagements with the Boston Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Gürzenich-Orchestra Cologne, Cleveland, Gulbenkian and Hallé Orchestras, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Filarmonica della Scala, the London, Melbourne, San Francisco, Singapore, Tokyo, and Washington National Symphony Orchestras, and an appearance at the 2015 Last Night of the Proms.
with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop. Among his major recital dates are Vienna Konzerthaus, Théâtre des Champs Elysées Paris, Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, Carnegie Hall New York, Konzerthaus Berlin, Barbican Centre London, Musashino Civic Cultural Hall Tokyo, the Lucerne and Gilmore Festivals, La Roque d'Antheron, the International Piano Series at the Southbank Centre as well as his first tour of South America. Benjamin has worked with numerous esteemed conductors including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Jiří Bělohlávek, Andrey Boreyko, Semyon Bychkov, Riccardo Chailly, Charles Dutoit, Sir Mark Elder, Edward Gardner, Alan Gilbert, Vladimir Jurowski, Andrew Litton, Andrew Manze, Ludovic Morlot, Kent Nagano, Gianandrea Noseda, Sir Roger Norrington, François-Xavier Roth, Alexander Shelley, Thomas Søndergård, Nathalie Stutzmann, Gábor Takács-Nagy and with Michael Tilson Thomas.
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The School of Music at Kennesaw State University continues to be an exciting place! This year’s Signature Series features four wonderful performances that we know will be memorable and well worth your investment. The 27-time Grammy Award winning Atlanta Symphony is with us again. We so value our professional relationship with this orchestra and we love having them here on our Morgan stage.

Having just completed our 10th Anniversary Season, the Dr. Bobbie Bailey & Family Performance Center is poised to begin the next decade of bringing you outstanding musical performances and artists from around the world! The Bailey Center continues to be transformational in the life of our school and for you, our patrons!

We are continuing our Name a Seat campaign this year. If you have a friend, loved one, child, student, teacher, or significant other that you would like to honor or memorialize, we welcome your support. Your $1,000 gift to the Name a Seat endowment helps us to ensure that we can continue to bring you amazing musical performances well into the future.

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Stephen W. Plate, Director, KSU School of Music

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