I am particularly fond of Strauss’ Der Rosenkavalier, not only for its sheer beauty, but also for the rich and sparkling harmonies, and the dramatic narrative throughout the piece. The euphoric ending, especially, is such a satisfying moment to play.

SUNRISE KIM, NCS CELLO

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 30

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

BORN April 1, 1873, in Oneg, Russia; died March 28, 1943, in Beverly Hills

PREMIERE Composed 1909; first performance November 28, 1909, in New York City, conducted by Walter Damrosch, with the composer as soloist

THE STORY

The worlds of technology and art sometimes brush against each other in curious ways. In 1909, it seems, Sergei Rachmaninoff wanted one of those new mechanical wonders — an automobile. And thereupon hangs the tale of his first visit to America.

The impresario Henry Wolfson of New York arranged a 30-concert tour for the 1909/10 season for Rachmaninoff so that he could play and conduct his own works in a number of American cities. Rachmaninoff was hesitant about leaving his family and Russian home for such an extended overseas trip, but the generous financial remuneration was too tempting to resist.

With a few tour details still left unsettled, Wolfson died suddenly in the spring of 1909, and the composer was much relieved that the journey would probably be canceled. Wolfson’s agency had a contract with Rachmaninoff, however, and during the summer finished the arrangements for his appearances. Trying to look on the bright side of this daunting prospect, Rachmaninoff wrote to his long-time friend Nikita Morozov, “I
don’t want to go. But then perhaps, after America I’ll be able to buy myself that automobile ... It may not be so bad after all!”

It was for the American tour that Rachmaninoff composed his Third Piano Concerto.

LISTENING TIPS

First movement: The first of the concerto’s three large movements is a modified sonata form that begins with a haunting theme, recalled in the later movements, which sets perfectly the concerto’s mood of somber intensity. The espressivo second theme is presented by the pianist. The development section is concerned mostly with transformations of fragments from the first theme. A massive solo cadenza, separated into two parts by the recall of the main theme by the woodwinds, leads to the recapitulation.

Second movement: Subtitled Intermezzo, the second movement is a set of free variations.

Third movement: The finale is in three large sections. The first part has an abundance of themes that Rachmaninoff skillfully derived from those of the opening movement. The relationship is further strengthened in the finale’s second section, where both themes from the opening movement are recalled in slow tempo. Finally, the pace quickens and the music from the first part of the finale returns with some modifications. A brief cadenza leads to a dazzling coda to conclude the work.

INSTRUMENTATION

Solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, strings
Icarus

LERA AUERBACH

BORN October 23, 1974 in Chelyabinsk, Russia

PREMIERE Composed 2006 and 2011; first performance July 18, 2011, by the Verbier Festival Orchestra in Switzerland, Charles Dutoit conducting

THE STORY

Lera Auerbach, a young artist with breathtaking creative gifts, has forged impressive parallel careers as composer, pianist, visual artist, and poet. She first appeared in public at age six, performed on national television at eight, wrote a full-length opera four years later that was performed in Moscow and toured throughout the Soviet Union, won several international piano competitions, and in 1996 was not only named Poet of the Year by the International Pushkin Society but also received the Weinberg-Vainer Poetry Prize presented by Novoye Russkoye Slovo, the largest Russian-language daily newspaper in the West.

During a concert tour to the United States in 1991, she defected, despite her youth and the separation from her family; she was among the last artists to defect before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Auerbach attended The Juilliard School, where she earned degrees in piano and composition, as well as the Hannover Hochschule für Musik. She also studied comparative literature at Columbia University. Her teachers included Einar Steen-Nøkleberg, Nina Svetlanova, and Joseph Kalichstein in piano, and Milton Babbitt and Robert Beaser in composition.

In May 1998, Auerbach was among the first recipients of the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, the only artist among the 20 chosen for that major grant, which recognizes and assists some of the most accomplished and deserving young recent immigrants and children of immigrants. Her other distinctions include the Hindemith Prize from the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, Förderpreis
Deutschlandfunk, and participation in the Young Global Leaders Forum of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, from 2007 to 2012; she continues to work with the WEF as a Cultural Leader, giving presentations around the world on “Borderless Creativity.”

Auerbach has composed more than a hundred works, including concertos, symphonies, opera, ballet, and choral and chamber music. As a pianist, she has appeared to great acclaim in Europe and the United States and at leading international music festivals. Her poetry has appeared in more than a hundred Russian-language literary newspapers and magazines worldwide, and her published literature includes two novels and five volumes of poetry and prose; she was president of the jury for the 2000 International Pushkin Poetry Competition. Her visual art has been included in several exhibitions and in 2013, she had her first solo exhibition in Norway.

LISTENING TIPS
Auerbach has been fascinated and inspired by Greek mythology since childhood, admitting that “the world of jealous gods and god-like humans was more real to me than the world outside my windows.”

In the myth that inspired this work, Icarus was the son of Daedalus, the craftsman who created the Labyrinth—a huge maze located under the palace of King Minos of Crete, where the fearsome Minotaur, half man and half bull, was confined. To prevent Daedalus from sharing the secret of the Labyrinth’s construction, Minos imprisoned him and his son Icarus in a tower. To escape, Daedalus constructed two pairs of wings made from feathers glued together with wax. On the day of their attempt, Daedalus warned his son not to fly too close to the sun lest the heat melt the wax and the wings fail, but Icarus, with the impetuosity of youth, ignored the advice and drowned in the sea. The nearby island of Icaria was named for him.
INSTRUMENTATION

Three flutes (one doubling piccolo, one doubling alto flute), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, celesta, two harps, strings

Suite from Der Rosenkavalier, Op. 59

RICHARD STRAUSS

BORN June 11, 1864, in Munich; died September 8, 1949, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen
PREMIERE Composed: 1909-1910; first performance January 26, 1911 in Dresden, Ernst von Schuch conducting

THE STORY

The libretto for Der Rosenkavalier, by the gifted Austrian man of letters Hugo von Hofmannsthal, is one of the masterworks of its type for the lyric stage. Set in aristocratic 18th-century Vienna, it gently probes the young love of Octavian and Sophie, poignantly examines the fading youth of the Marschallin, and humorously exposes the blustering Baron Ochs.

Former New York Times critic Harold Schonberg wrote of the emotional milieu of the opera, “In Der Rosenkavalier, there are no Jungian archetypes, only the human condition. Instead of long narratives, there are Viennese waltzes. Instead of a monumental Liebestod, there is a sad, elegant lament from a beautiful woman who begins to see old age. Instead of death, we get a bittersweet and hauntingly beautiful trio that in effect tells us life will go on as it has always gone on. People do not die for love in Hofmannsthal’s world. They face the inevitable, surrender with what grace they can summon up, and then look around for life’s next episode.”
Der Rosenkavalier is an opera wise and worldly, sophisticated and touching, sentimental and funny—and it is wedded to some of the most opulently glorious music to emerge from the opera house in the 20th century.

LISTENING TIPS
The Berlin Boersen-Courier reported before the premiere of Strauss’ 1911 opera that the score was “absolutely un-Strausslike, inasmuch as none of the excessively modern subtleties predominates in the vocal parts or orchestration. On the contrary, the score is brimming over with exceedingly pleasant and catchy melodies, most of them in three-four time. Yes, melodies, incredible as this may sound in the case of Richard Strauss. One waltz, especially ... is likely to become so popular that many people will believe it is the work, not of Richard, but of Johann Strauss...” (The two Strausses were unrelated.)

INSTRUMENTATION
Three flutes (one doubling piccolo), three oboes (one doubling English horn), three clarinets (one doubling E-flat clarinet), bass clarinet, three bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, two harps, strings

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