

# Concert Program for November 11, 12, and 13, 2011

Jun Märkl, conductor  
Horacio Gutiérrez, piano

**BEETHOVEN** Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, op. 73,  
(1770-1827) “Emperor” (1809)  
Allegro  
Adagio un poco mosso—  
Rondo: Allegro

Horacio Gutiérrez, piano

Intermission

**R. STRAUSS** *Death and Transfiguration (Tod und Verklärung)* (1889)  
(1864-1949)

**RAVEL** *La Valse* (1920)  
(1875-1937)

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Jun Märkl is the Linda and Paul Lee Guest Artist.

Horacio Gutiérrez is brought to you through the generosity of the Whitaker Foundation as part of the Whitaker Guest Artist Series.

The concert of Friday, November 11, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from Sanford and Rosalind Neuman.

The concert of Saturday, November 12, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from the Estate of Mrs. Jane S. Burke.

The concert of Sunday, November 13, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from Mr. Richard G. Engelsmann.

These concerts are presented by the Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation.

Pre-Concert Conversations are presented by Washington University Physicians.

These concerts are part of the Wells Fargo Advisors Series.



**Jun Märkl** Linda and Paul Lee Guest Artist

Jun Märkl is currently Chief Conductor of the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony. From 2005-11 Märkl was Music Director of the Orchestre national de Lyon.

He has guest conducted many distinguished orchestras worldwide including, in 2011, the Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Gurzenich Orchester Cologne, Oslo Philharmonic, Helsinki Philharmonic, Residentie Orkest, City of Birmingham

Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Mito Chamber Orchestra, and the NHK Symphony (Tokyo), where he returns every season.

Märkl was, until 2006, Permanent Conductor of the Bavarian State Opera in Munich. He conducted a complete *Ring Cycle* at the Deutsche Oper and at the New National Theatre in Tokyo (directed by Keith Warner). He has also been a regular guest at the Berlin State Opera, Vienna State Opera, and the Semper Oper Dresden. Märkl made his Royal Opera House debut with *Götterdämmerung* in 1996, and his Metropolitan Opera debut with *Il trovatore* in 1998.

Born in Munich, his (German) father was a distinguished concertmaster and his (Japanese) mother a solo pianist. Märkl studied violin, piano, and conducting at the Musikhochschule in Hannover, going on to study with Sergiu Celibidache in Munich and with Gustav Meier in Michigan. In 1986 he won the conducting competition of the Deutsche Musikrat and a year later won a scholarship from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to study at Tanglewood with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa. Soon afterwards he had a string of appointments in European opera houses followed by his first music directorships at the Staatstheater in Saarbrücken (1991-94) and at the Mannheim Nationaltheater (1994-2000).

Jun Märkl most recently conducted the St. Louis Symphony in March 2009.



**Horacio Gutiérrez** Whitaker Guest Artist

Horacio Gutiérrez is consistently praised by critics and audiences alike for the poetic insight and technical mastery he brings to a diverse repertoire. Since his professional debut in 1970 with Zubin Mehta and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Gutiérrez has appeared regularly with the world's greatest orchestras and on major recital series.

His 2011-12 engagements include returns to the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Atlanta, San Francisco, Winnipeg, and San Diego, plus opening the new Soka Arts Center in Orange County, California, performing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Pacific Symphony. A favorite of New York concertgoers, Gutiérrez has performed on numerous occasions at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall and Carnegie Hall in recital and with orchestra. He has been a frequent soloist at the Mostly Mozart Festival and has appeared on its season-opening *Live from Lincoln Center* telecast. As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with the Guarneri, Tokyo, and Cleveland quartets as well as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. In 1982, he was the recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize.

Gutiérrez is a strong advocate of contemporary American composers. Of special importance was his performance of William Schuman's Piano Concerto in honor of the composer's 75th birthday at New York's 92nd Street Y and of André Previn's Piano Concerto with the New York Philharmonic with Previn conducting. He frequently includes George Perle's *Phantasyplay* on his recital programs, and Perle wrote a set of nine bagatelles dedicated to Gutiérrez.

Born in Havana, Cuba, Gutiérrez appeared at age 11 as guest soloist with the Havana Symphony. He became an American citizen in 1967. A graduate of the Juilliard School, he is married to pianist Patricia Asher and resides in New York City.

Horacio Gutiérrez most recently performed with the St. Louis Symphony in May 2010.

# Transfigurations

BY MATTHEW ERIKSON

## *Ideas at Play*

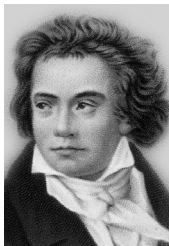
The most symphonic of Beethoven's five piano concertos, the Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major headlines a program that includes ambitious, lavishly orchestrated works by Richard Strauss and Maurice Ravel. Although Beethoven never intended the piano concerto's title of "Emperor," the music is sweeping and grand in scope—qualities that, it turns out, are shared by Strauss' *Death and Transfiguration* and Ravel's *La Valse*.

Both Strauss' tone poem and Ravel's "poème choréographique" are associated with fin-de-siècle decadence, yet they come from different decades as well as different stages in these composers' compositional careers. Although its title suggests otherwise, Strauss' *Death and Transfiguration* (*Tod und Verklärung*) is a product of his youth, written prior to the operas *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*. Ravel wrote *La Valse* in the gloomy years following World War I, which places it somewhere in the middle of the French composer's oeuvre.

Beethoven's concerto dates from his heroic middle period during a year that posed significant challenges for the German composer. Two centuries later, the Fifth Piano Concerto seldom fails to inspire and exhilarate its listeners with its strongly affirmative music.

## Ludwig van Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, op. 73, "Emperor"

**Born:** Bonn, Germany, December 16, 1770 **Died:** Vienna, March 26, 1827 **First performance:** November 28, 1811, in the Leipzig Gewandhaus; Friederich Schneider performed as soloist and Johann Schulz conducted the famed Gewandhaus Orchestra **STL Symphony premiere:** November 14, 1913, Wilhelm Backhaus was soloist, Max Zach conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** March 21, 2009, Richard Goode was soloist, with David Robertson conducting **Scoring:** Solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 38 minutes



Beethoven

**In Context** 1809 James Madison succeeds Thomas Jefferson as U.S. President; Pope Mark VIII excommunicates Napoleon after the French emperor's invasion of the Papal States; composers Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann born in Germany

The youngest son of Austrian Emperor Leopold II, Archduke Rudolph was by far Beethoven's most important patron. In 1809, the Archduke had a pivotal role to play in securing Beethoven's financial stability

at a time when political events and personal circumstances conspired against the composer.

In May of that year, Beethoven's mentor Joseph Haydn had died. In that same month, Vienna was under siege by Napoleonic armies for the second time in four years. On the night of May 11, Beethoven took shelter at his brother's house, where it is said that he covered his head with pillows during the shelling. A day later, Vienna surrendered to the French troops.

By that time, the Austrian court had evacuated the capital. Beethoven immortalized the departure of Archduke Rudolph, his piano and composition student, in the "Lebewohl" or "Les Adieux" piano sonata. In the identical key of E-flat and completed during that same turbulent year, the Piano Concerto No. 5 is also dedicated to the Archduke—two of many important works Beethoven wrote for his young patron.

Why did Beethoven feel so indebted to the Archduke? Along with feelings of genuine affection, there is the account of how in 1808 Jerome Bonaparte, the youngest brother of Napoleon, had invited Beethoven to become his Kapellmeister, or court musician, in Kassel. Although Beethoven had no real intention of leaving Vienna, the offer was leverage for the composer to secure a better deal. Beethoven rejected Bonaparte's invitation when Archduke Rudolph, joined by two other patrons, Prince Lobkowitz and Prince Kinsky, pooled resources to provide him an annual salary to convince him to stay in Vienna.

The contract was signed on March 1, 1809. In that same period preceding the May siege, it's believed that much of the Piano Concerto No. 5 was written. Premiered later in 1811, it is the only one of Beethoven's piano concertos that wasn't debuted by the composer at the keyboard.

**The Music** Unlike the more introverted and gently searching Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fifth Piano Concerto contains all the martial and exalted sounds that the word "emperor" might evoke. In the Fourth Piano Concerto, trumpets and timpani don't enter until the final movement. But here in the declamatory Fifth, this regal combination of instruments starts from the very beginning.

In fact, the concerto begins with a thunderous chord in the orchestra, the first of three chords outlining a basic harmonic progression. In the introduction, the piano is immediately at the forefront of musical activity, succeeded by an orchestral tutti section rife with martial rhythms and victory motifs. According to 20th-century musicologist Alfred Einstein, this concerto is "the apotheosis of the military concept."

The concerto's key of E-flat major inevitably recalls Beethoven's epic symphony in the same key, the "Eroica." But whereas the "Eroica" Symphony features a funeral march as its second movement, the slow movement of the concerto is full of tender repose and lyricism, with the piano setting a tone of intimate expressivity. Ultimately, exalted triumph and hymn-like peace coexist in the "Emperor."

With a simple half-note descent in the bassoon, the second movement pivots from the remote key of B major back to the original key of E-flat. As with the rest of the concerto's movements, the piano leads the charge in the

finale with a propulsive rondo theme alive with galloping and syncopated rhythms. Highly virtuosic, the piano part ends in a short duet with the timpani, which is punctuated further by a concluding orchestral flourish.

## Richard Strauss *Death and Transfiguration* (*Tod und Verklärung*)

**Born:** Munich, Kingdom of Bavaria, June 11, 1864 **Died:** Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, September 8, 1949 **First performance:** June 21, 1890, in Eisenach, Germany, with the composer conducting **STL Symphony premiere:** February 18, 1909, Max Zach conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** February 24, 2001, Bernhard Klee conducting **Scoring:** Three flutes, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and other percussion, two harps, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 23 minutes



Strauss

**In Context** 1889 *Eiffel Tower* opens in Paris to disapproving critics; Vincent van Gogh paints *Starry Night*; philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche suffers a mental breakdown while in Turin, Italy

The son of a professional horn player, Richard Strauss began composing at age six. Throughout his teenage years, the Munich-born composer wrote mostly in conservative forms and genres, including sonatas, concertos, and symphonies. Tone poems and operas in the Wagner mold came later, after Strauss' acquaintance with German composer and violinist Alexander Ritter.

Strauss first met Ritter while in his early 20s as an assistant to conductor Hans von Bülow in Meiningen, Germany. The nephew of Richard Wagner by marriage, Ritter introduced Strauss to the works of Wagner, Liszt, and Berlioz. Ritter, who was 30 years older and more world-wise, steered Strauss as well toward the existential writings of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and the high ideals of music as a metaphysical art form.

This all found full expression for Strauss in the musical genre known as the tone poem, or *Tondichtung*. Different from the "absolute music" of Classical symphonies, tone poems owe their inspiration to a literary source, external program or narrative. After returning to Munich to head the Court Opera, Strauss began composing the first of two cycles of tone poems, which included *Macbeth*, the popular *Don Juan*, and *Death and Transfiguration* (*Tod und Verklärung*). The latter turned out to be one of Strauss' most profound and loftily conceived works. Warmly received at its first performances, *Death and Transfiguration* led the critic Edward Hanslick to presciently write that Strauss' talent "is really such as to point him in the direction of music drama."

Strauss wrote that his intention with *Death and Transfiguration* had been to "represent the death of a person who had striven for the brightest ideals." In Strauss' scenario, the artist finally realizes that the ideals to which he had aspired are only attainable when the soul leaves the body.

For a later edition of the score, Ritter supplied a poem of similar sentiment to Strauss' written narrative. Many years later, Strauss casually disavowed these words, stating that “[*Death and Transfiguration*] is purely the product of the imagination; it is not based on any kind of personal experience.”

More revealing, Strauss remarked on his deathbed at age 85 that “dying is exactly like I composed it 60 years ago in *Tod und Verklärung*.” Only months earlier, Strauss had included the main musical theme of *Death and Transfiguration* in the concluding measures of his *Four Last Songs*.

**The Music** Many of the musical gestures of *Death and Transfiguration* quite literally depict aspects of Strauss' narrative. The halting, syncopated pulse of the opening, for instance, represents the irregular breathing of the dying artist; the tam-tam, heard later on, depicts the soul leaving the body.

Viewed purely musically, this tone poem is unique in the way its main theme isn't heard until the middle of the work. Finally, in the piece's exhilarating climax—after having grown steadily over the course of one dramatic peak after another—it is presented in its full glory.

The music begins in the key of C minor and ends in C major and thus can be viewed as a progression from darkness into light. Metaphorically, this passage from death to transfiguration might have had deeper historical resonance for Strauss. Wagner had died in Venice in 1883. And like Wagner and Schopenhauer, Strauss believed in rebirth through death. Therefore, it isn't too much of a stretch to suggest that Strauss was contemplating the transformation of German music—at his own hands, no less—with this work.

## Maurice Ravel *La Valse*

**Born:** Ciboure, France, March 7, 1875 **Died:** Paris, December 28, 1937 **First performance:** December 12, 1920, in Paris; Camille Chevard conducted the Lamoureux Orchestra **STL Symphony premiere:** December 23, 1921, Rudolph Ganz conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** October 20, 2007, David Robertson conducting **Scoring:** Three flutes and piccolo, three oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and other percussion, two harps, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 12 minutes



Ravel

**In Context** 1920 *Prohibition* begins in the U.S. with the passage of the 18th Amendment; Sigmund Freud writes the essay “*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*”; League of Nations holds its first meeting in Geneva

A French perspective on a Viennese waltz? For Ravel, who had always been captivated by different kinds of musical exoticism, a celebration of the waltz wasn't too far afield. And *La Valse*, as it later became known, seemed to tie in nicely with a hoped for ballet commission from

Russian impresario Sergey Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes, with whom Ravel had already collaborated.

But this collaboration wasn't meant to be. After hearing a two-piano version of *La Valse* with composers Igor Stravinsky and Francis Poulenc in attendance, Diaghilev famously remarked, "Ravel, it's a masterpiece but it's not a ballet... It's the portrait of a ballet." Ravel never forgave Diaghilev for uttering these words.

One wonders if Diaghilev was perplexed by the music's whirling intensity, particularly near the end when it swells to progressively harsher discords and dizzying syncopations. Although composer Darius Milhaud described the 1920 Parisian premiere of *La Valse* in tame language ("Saint-Saëns for Russian ballet"), others saw in the music's turbulent conclusion an acute commentary on the destruction of World War I, the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as civilization's cataclysmic end.

"One should see in it only what the music expresses: an ascending progression of sonority," Ravel wrote in response to this reaction. For him, staging this music as a ballet, "illuminated by footlights," placed this work in its correct creative context.

Ravel's wish was fulfilled when the ballet was premiered in 1926 by the Royal Flemish Opera Ballet in Antwerp, Belgium.

**The Music** Ravel arranged *La Valse* for a large orchestra, bigger than the size of *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. *La Valse* begins with double basses playing in three parts, accompanied by melodic snippets from the bassoons. This foggy start is succeeded by the elegant principal waltz theme, first heard in the violins with later variations by the oboe, brass, and other instruments. Harp glissandi add fine filigree to the music-making.

*La Valse* is in two parts. Whereas the first succession of waltzes is cheerful and charming in the Johann Strauss, Jr. mold, the second series (introduced again by the double basses) is an increasingly disorienting caricature of the first. The orchestration becomes more and more strident, the textures denser and the triple meter gradually lost in helter-skelter rhythms. In effect, civilized order descends into chaos, especially in the work's danse macabre coda.

As contemporary critic Paul Griffiths astutely wrote, *La Valse* is "the waltz to end all waltzes."

Program notes © 2011 by Matthew Erikson

*The St. Louis Symphony invited four writers to produce program notes this season. Matthew Erikson is a freelance journalist and musician. His articles have appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Boston Globe, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and Hartford Courant. He has also worked as a classical music radio announcer and producer for WRR Classical 101.1 in Dallas, Texas, and Aspen Public Radio (Colorado). Erikson currently lives and works in Phoenix, Arizona.*