‘The’ Organ Symphony

SCHERMERHORN SYMPHONY CENTER
LAURA TURNER CONCERT HALL
January 7, 2010, at 7 p.m.
January 8 & 9, 2010, at 8 p.m.

Nashville Symphony
Giancarlo Guerrero, *conductor*
Hilary Hahn, *violin*

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ	The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca, H. 352 Andante poco moderato Adagio Poco allegro
JENNIFER HIGDON	Violin Concerto 1726 Chaconni Fly Forward Hilary Hahn, *violin*
	intermission
CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS	Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78, “Organ” Part I: Adagio - Allegro moderato Poco adagio Part II: Allegro moderato – Presto Maestoso - Allegro

Hilary Hahn appears by arrangement with IMG Artists, 152 W. 57th St., 5th Floor, New York, NY 10019. Hahn records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon. Her recordings are also available on Sony Classical/Song BMG Masterworks.

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

Born on December 8, 1890, in Polička, Bohemia (part of the Habsburg Empire); died on August 28, 1959, in Liestal, Switzerland

The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca, H. 352

Bohuslav Martinů composed *The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca* in less than a month, between February and March 1955, while living in Nice, France. He dedicated the score to fellow Czech Rafael Kubelík, who gave the premiere with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival on August 26, 1956. These are the first Nashville Symphony performances of the work.

The score calls for piccolo, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, tenor and bass drums, cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, xylophone, harp and strings.

estimated length: 18 minutes

As a young boy, Bohuslav Martinů would gaze out for hours from the unusually lofty location where his family made its home. He spent a peaceful childhood in the sleepy, medieval Czech town of Polička, near the border between Bohemia and Moravia. There his father, a cobbler, doubled as the community's fire lookout and bell-ringer. Those duties entitled the family to live in a cramped apartment nestled high above the bells and clock of the town's neo-Gothic campanile, separated from the world below by a precarious flight of 193 spiraling (and sometimes wobbly) steps. The composer later remarked that his artistic sensibility in general was influenced by the striking visual perspective.

The long flight up and down, Martinů speculated, may have influenced the sense of unfolding space that can be discerned in his music. The memory of this bird's-eye view stayed with him throughout his long exile from his homeland: first in Paris, then as a reluctant U.S. resident who had fled the Third Reich, and finally in Western Europe. When he was able to return to Europe for the first time after World War II, Martinů became haunted by his encounter with the work of painter Piero della Francesca (c. 1420-1492), whose unique sense of geometrical form profoundly influenced the development of visual perspective among Renaissance artists.

In 1955, Martinů made a visit to central Italy and chanced upon Piero's *Resurrection* in the small town of Sansepulcro, which had narrowly survived shelling toward the end of the war. He proceeded to investigate Piero's frescoes in nearby Arezzo — particularly the sequence of episodes collectively known as *The Legend of the True Cross*, which had been painted in the Basilica of San Francesco. The sequence traces the history of the cross on which Jesus was crucified, from the death of Adam (as the tree planted at his burial was believed to be the original source of the wood of the cross) up to the Eastern Roman Empire in the 7th century.

The experience moved the remarkably prolific Martinů to compose his first orchestral music since coming back to Europe in 1953. Brian Large, the composer's biographer, observes that in these frescoes, "Martinů found the substance of all that he wanted to put into music, the peace and colors of nature, the simplicity of form, the philosophy of acceptance and resignation." *The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca* distills Martinů's response to Piero's work into a tripartite piece for large orchestra.

Martinů didn't intend his composition to provide simple one-on-one correspondences or to be perceived as "program music" accompanying the frescoes. Rather, it renders in sound his admiration for the extraordinary serenity Piero communicates through his geometry of form and use of color. The composer characterized this quality as a "solemn, frozen silence and opaque-colored atmosphere, which contains strange, peaceful, yet moving poetry."

Martinů, does, however, refer to specific frescoes as points of inspiration for the different movements. The first (Andante poco moderato) concerns Piero's bipartite panel depicting the Queen of Sheba: Before she is received into Solomon's palace, the Queen kneels before a wooden bridge when she is granted a prophetic revelation that its wood will be used in the cross. The music immediately evokes Martinů's "opaque-colored atmosphere," drawing on the composer's long-ago infatuation with Impressionism. Bright, ceremonial melodies cut through with clarity, but the mystical tone of the opening returns to frame the movement, the fog at last resolving into a lucid major chord.

The second movement is an Adagio prompted by the fresco of Constantine's Dream, in which an angel assures the future emperor he will conquer the rival Roman leader Maxentius by following the sign of the cross. Martinů's score captures the dreamlike sense of battle to come by giving the call to arms to a solo viola (the single programmatic moment acknowledged by the composer in his comments on the work). Serenely celestial harmonies contrast with a quickening sense of agitation.

The final movement (Poco allegro) is the shortest and mixes the composer's responses to two of the crucial battle scenes in the cycle (that of Constantine at the Milvian Bridge and that between the Eastern Empire and the Persian King Khosrau II). An almost jazzy theme is set against more overtly martial strains, but after the tension reaches a climax, Martinů quickly resolves the piece on a widely spaced chord that echoes the closure of the first movement and brings the fantasy to a close.

JENNIFER HIGDON

Born on December 31, 1962, in Brooklyn, N.Y.; currently residing in Philadelphia

Concerto for Violin

Jennifer Higdon's Violin Concerto was commissioned for violinist Hilary Hahn by the Indianapolis Symphony, the Toronto Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony and the Curtis Institute of Music. Higdon composed the score in 2008, dedicating it "to Hilary Hahn, with great admiration and enthusiasm." Hahn was soloist at the premiere with the Indianapolis Symphony under Mario Venzago. These performances are the first by the Nashville Symphony.

In addition to solo violin, the score calls for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, harp, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, Chinese cymbal, rute, chimes, crotales, marimba, glockenspiel, knitting needles and strings.

estimated length: 35 minutes

Over the last decade, Jennifer Higdon has established herself among the top 10 living American composers most frequently performed by symphony orchestras. It's all the more extraordinary to realize that she came to the world of classical music relatively late. Born in Brooklyn, Higdon grew up in Atlanta and rural Tennessee with lots of exposure to country and rock and, thanks to her parents' involvement with the visual arts, avant-garde art happenings. But she decided at age 15 to teach herself flute and became a performance major at Bowling Green State in Ohio.

The idea of composing, Higdon recalls, arose almost by chance after a few years of study, when her flute teacher asked her to write a short piece. "I found arranging sounds to be fascinating," says Higdon. Soon the desire to compose became unavoidable, taking over her life. Now, with commissions pouring in and her music in such high demand, Higdon is frequently on the road, yet still maintains the discipline to compose several hours every day of the week.

In 2000, the Philadelphia-based Curtis Institute commissioned a 15-minute orchestral piece, which resulted in Higdon's moving *blue cathedral* (2000). This breakthrough work soon had a widespread impact, introducing Higdon's gift for emotionally direct and colorfully textured language. She has since written a wide spectrum of pieces for orchestra and chamber groups, with her much anticipated first opera — on a not-yet-announced topic, to a libretto by Gene Scheer — now in the works as a commission from San Francisco Opera for 2013.

The concerto format figures prominently in Higdon's catalog. These include the acclaimed Concerto for Orchestra, a bluegrass-styled concerto for string trio, and solo concertos for trombone, soprano sax and percussion. Just last month the National Symphony premiered her new Piano Concerto, and later this season conductor Robert Spano — a longtime champion — will introduce her concerto for the new-music group eighth blackbird and the Atlanta Symphony. Higdon remarks that the prospect of tailoring to a particular artist's personality stimulates her creativity. The present Violin Concerto, notes the composer, represented "a big mountain to cross," since the existing literature includes so many masterpieces. In this case, Higdon was inspired by the musical personality of Hilary Hahn, whom she met while teaching at the Curtis Institute.

"The 'story' of the Violin Concerto," she explains, "is really Hilary and her violin." Higdon studied both the familiar repertory of violin concertos and relatively unknown works, seeking interesting angles for showing off the instrument. She also consulted closely with Hahn, particularly for the first movement — the last to be composed. Its fiendishly difficult cadenza turned out to be "unlike anything" the violinist had seen or heard before.

Higdon graciously supplied the following commentary on the Violin Concerto:

"I believe that one of the most rewarding aspects of life is exploring and discovering the magic and mysteries held within our universe. For a composer this thrill often takes place in the writing of a concerto…. It is the exploration of an instrument's world, a journey of the imagination, confronting and stretching an instrument's limits, and discovering a particular performer's gifts.

"The first movement of this concerto, written for the violinist, Hilary Hahn, carries a somewhat enigmatic title of 1726. This number represents an important aspect of such a journey of discovery for both the composer and the soloist. 1726 happens to be the street address of the Curtis Institute of Music, where I first met Hilary as a student in my 20th century music class. An exceptional student, Hilary devoured the information in the class and was always open to exploring and discovering new musical languages and styles. As Curtis was also a primary training ground for me as a young composer, it seemed an appropriate tribute. To tie into this title, I make extensive use of the intervals of unisons, 7ths and 2nds throughout this movement.

"The excitement of the first movement's intensity certainly deserves the calm and pensive relaxation of the second movement. This title, Chaconni, comes from the word 'chaconne.' A chaconne is a chord progression that repeats throughout a section of music. In this particular case, there are several chaconnes, which create the stage for a dialogue between the soloist and various members of the orchestra. The beauty of the violin's tone and the artist's gifts are on display here.

"The third movement, Fly Forward, seemed like such a compelling image that I could not resist the idea of having the soloist do exactly that. Concerti throughout history have always allowed the soloist to delight the audience with feats of great virtuosity, and when a composer is confronted with a real gift in the soloist's ability to do so, well, it would be foolhardy not to allow that dream to become a reality."

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Born on October 9, 1836, in Paris, France; died on December 16, 1921, in Algiers, Algeria (then part of the French Empire)

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78 "Organ"

Camille Saint-Saëns composed his Symphony No. 3 early in 1886 on a commission from London's Royal Philharmonic Society. He led that ensemble in the premiere on May 19, 1886, in London. When Franz Liszt died two months afterward, Saint-Saëns dedicated the score to him. The Nashville Symphony's first performance of the work was in April 1966, with conductor Willis Page.

The score calls for piccolo, 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, organ, piano four hands and strings.

estimated length: 34 minutes

As a musical prodigy, Camille Saint-Saëns was not only in the league of Mozart and Mendelssohn, but could be said to have raised the bar for precociously gifted children. At 2, according to his own recollection, he was dissecting household sounds with uncanny attentiveness, able to discern entire symphonies in chiming clocks and the whistling of the tea kettle. Saint-Saëns began performing at the piano at 4. For his first public recital in Paris — at the age of 10 — he played piano concertos by Mozart and Beethoven. One of the oft-repeated anecdotes of classical music lore records that, as an encore, Saint-Saëns offered to perform the audience's choice of any one of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas — by memory, of course.

Likewise, Saint-Saëns took to composition as naturally — and fruitfully — as an apple tree bears apples, to use one of the composer's own favorite metaphors. He attempted a first symphony at 16 but destroyed the score, waiting till the ripe age of 18 to unveil his official First Symphony in public. As an astonished Berlioz put it, the young man's one weakness seemed to be that "he lacks inexperience." Such feats of showmanship were simply par for the course in a musical life marked by extraordinary productivity and longevity. Saint-Saëns continued in the public eye right up into his 86th year, giving his last performance just a few months before he died in December 1921.

His gifts weren't limited to music. Saint-Saëns possessed an encyclopedic intellect. He was an aficionado of archeology, mathematics, botany, butterflies, the history of stamps, classical drama and painting. In his later life, he indulged an insatiable enthusiasm for far-ranging travel. Saint-Saëns' long lifespan itself entailed an epic journey from the heyday of romanticism through the birth pangs of modernism and the trauma of World War I. While he had championed some of the new currents of music in the last decades of the 19th century, the aging Saint-Saëns came across as a curmudgeonly archconservative when he bitterly denounced the experiments of Debussy and Stravinsky.

Inevitably, the composer himself fell victim to the changing tides of musical fashion. His output was enormous and covered all the major genres — from chamber music to symphonies, operas and concertos — and he even wrote a pioneering film score in 1908. But just a tiny fraction of these works lives on in regular performance today (although, gradually, some are being rediscovered and introduced once more). Saint-Saëns' most familiar compositions date from the 1870s and 1880s, when he was at the peak of his fame. These include a few concertos, the tone poem *Danse Macabre*, the opera *Samson and Delilah*, *The Carnival of the Animals* and the Third Symphony — the last two written back-to-back in 1886. Saint-Saens actually tried to suppress the delightful *Carnival*, allowing it to be published only after his death, since he feared its lightheartedness might puncture his reputation as a composer in the grand tradition.

In contrast, the Third Symphony — Saint-Saëns' last essay in the genre — reveals his determination to claim a place in the lineage of Beethoven and the great symphonists. France's public musical life at this time tended to be focused on the opera; symphonies seemed passé. Part of Saint-Saëns' legacy was to direct attention back to the field of instrumental music. And while he was hardly known as an innovator, the composer was eager to "update" some of the premises of symphonic writing as a way of helping to preserve its viability in an era when the symphony was deemed to be an engendered species.

This led Saint-Saëns to two choices about his overall conception of the Third Symphony. First, he noted that "the time has come for the symphony to benefit by the progress of modern instrumentation." Thus he amplifies the traditional classical orchestra with additional colors — English horn and contrabassoon in the woodwinds, for example. But most striking of all is the integration of piano and organ into the sonic texture. The Third Symphony's popular subtitle, "Organ Symphony," is something of a misnomer. (It didn't originate with the composer, in any case.) This isn't a symphony built around the presence of the organ, but one in which the organ (along with the piano) adds another dimension to symphonic rhetoric, bringing in sonorities that were previously associated with sacred music or grand operatic spectacle.

The other area where Saint-Saëns modified the classical symphonic model was in his choice of a two-movement design. In practical terms, there doesn't seem to be much difference from the familiar four-movement pattern: fast opening movement, slow movement, scherzo and finale. Yet Saint-Saëns fuses the first two and the last two to make a pair of mega-movements. He thus discards some of the traditional rounding-out of separate movements, aiming instead for a tighter sense of unity across the entire work. This Romantic preoccupation with organic unity also features in Franz Liszt's experiments with traditional forms. Saint-Saëns, who had been befriended by the Hungarian from a young age, admired his compositional innovations. The main Lisztian idea that underlies the Third is that of "thematic transformation": A core thematic idea spans the work but recurs in transformed guises, its character altered with each new context.

The symphony begins with a short but potent slow introduction, centered on a plaintive motto of four rising notes. It leads into the nervous music of the Allegro proper, where the main theme appears in an agitated form. A second thematic group, gracefully dancing in character, can keep apart only so long before Saint-Saëns starts interlacing it with the fatefully chugging music. He also pointedly suggests how the contours of the first theme trace the ominous *Dies irae* chant (an idea that will recur later in the symphony).

The blocking and piling up of harmonies as this material is spun through various developments suggest an organist's approach to the orchestra. In fact, Saint-Saëns was not only a brilliant pianist, but also a legendary organist who served for more than two decades at the neoclassical Madeleine Church in the heart of Paris. Yet the organ itself remains silent until we reach the Poco adagio. The music has subsided, and, following a short pause and a tonal slant into D-flat major, the organ discreetly builds a contemplative atmosphere. A serene melody rises slowly from the strings and organ, spreading to other instrumental choirs. The meditation continues even as the agitated version of the theme from the Allegro works its way back in. Saint-Saëns described the closing pages of the movement as "mystical" in their unearthly swaying between D-flat major and E minor.

The symphony's second half returns to the turbulent unease of the first Allegro — the opening music in yet another transformation, placed against an arresting rhythmic pattern. Saint-Saëns introduces the sparkling textures of rapid-fire piano scales in a Presto section, hinting at the breakthrough to come. From the depths emerges a stern, brassy motif, and all of these elements contend to win the day until the full power of the king of instruments is unleashed. Its resounding C major chord — how fresh it sounds in the meandering tonal contexts that have preceded — is the entrée into the final section. The Maestoso restates the symphony's cyclic theme, now as a silvery chorale that grows in confidence and strength. Saint-Saëns introduces a highly contrasting episode of woodwinds — like momentarily gazing at a passing scene of nature — and then presses on to seal his triumph over the anxious darkness with which the symphony began.

— Thomas May is the program annotator for the Nashville Symphony and writes regularly about music and theater. His books include Decoding Wagner *and* The John Adams Reader.

ARTIST BIO

HILARY HAHN, *violin*

Gramophone magazine's 2008 Artist of the Year, violinist Hilary Hahn is a two-time GRAMMY® Award-winning soloist celebrated for her probing interpretations, technical brilliance and compelling onstage presence. In the 2009/10 season, Hahn tours the United States, New Zealand, Japan, Germany, England, France, Austria, Luxembourg, Serbia and Iceland, and performs as a guest soloist with, among others, the Boston, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Dallas symphonies, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. In a special project this season, Hahn joins baritone Matthias Goerne, soprano Christine Schäfer and the Munich Chamber Orchestra for a series of European concerts featuring arias from their album *Bach: Violin and Voice*, which will be available on Deutsche Grammophon on January 12, 2010.

In the dozen years since she began recording, Hahn has released 11 solo albums on the Deutsche Grammophon and Sony labels. Her most recent recording, which paired the violin concertos of Schoenberg and Sibelius, debuted at No. 1 and spent the next 23 weeks on the *Billboard* classical chart. The album earned

Hahn her second GRAMMY®, the 2009 award for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance with Orchestra. (Her first GRAMMY® win came in 2003 for her album of Brahms and Stravinsky concertos.)

Hahn is also active on the contemporary classical music scene. In 1999, she premiered and recorded the violin concerto written for her by the American bassist and composer Edgar Meyer, and in 2009 she did the same with Jennifer Higdon's Concerto for Violin, also written for her. A recording of the Higdon concerto will be released on Deustche Grammophon in fall 2010 alongside Tchaikovsky's Concerto for Violin.

Hilary Hahn was born in Lexington, Virginia, in 1979. From age 10 to 17, she studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with the legendary Jascha Brodsky — the last surviving student of the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe — working closely with him until his death.

An enthusiastic writer, Hahn keeps a journal of her professional travels on her website (www.hilaryhahn.com), maintains a presence on Twitter (www.twitter.com/violincase) and produces a YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/hilaryhahnvideos). She also serves as guest video interviewer for the contemporary classical music blog Sequenza21.