

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY**

January 8-9-10, 2010

**RATHBUN**

*Three Psalms of Jerusalem*

**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**

*Flos Campi*

**HANDEL**

**Viola Concerto in B minor (arr. Henri Casadesus)**

Allegro moderato

Andante ma non troppo

Allegro

INTERMISSION

**PROKOFIEV**

**Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100**

Andante

Allegro moderato

Adagio

Allegro giocoso

### *Three Psalms of Jerusalem*

JEFFREY RATHBUN

Born March 17, 1959, Lockwood, Missouri

#### *A note from the composer:*

My orchestral composition, *Three Psalms of Jerusalem*, is essentially a work of three tone poems that depict sections of Psalms I selected from the Old Testament that have contrasting references to Jerusalem. I have not tried to literally describe these psalms in this piece, but have attempted to capture their mood, atmosphere, and range of emotion in the music I have written.

I see the first movement, Psalm 137, as being sad and nostalgic coupled with the harsh realities of exile in Babylon. The piece is mostly mono-thematic with the flute and piccolo stating this main theme at the beginning, along with accompaniment from the timpani that comes back in various guises. Later the horn plays the opening melody in C Major, representing the Jews' fond remembrances of Jerusalem. The music then builds up to a large climax and eventually dies down, leaving the lonely piccolo to close the movement.

It is almost impossible to represent the horrors and tragedies told in Psalm 79 with music, and the start of this movement sounds more like a dance with Death than a city being destroyed. The music is in a fast 5/4 throughout except for a slower tragic section near the end, by which time the music loses its dance-like quality and tries its best to keep up with the words written in Psalm 79.

Psalm 122 opens with a somber introduction featuring harp and viola solos followed by the presentation of the main melody by the strings in C Major. This same material then appears in the keys of Eb, F#, and A with varying orchestrations, and again in C for the climax. I have kept this movement short, simple and sincere, not unlike a prayer. The music fades away peacefully after the climax, hopefully conveying a sense of peace and prosperity for Jerusalem and those who love her.

*Three Psalms of Jerusalem* was premiered by Leonard Slatkin conducting the Cleveland Orchestra in August, 1998 on a special 50th Anniversary of Israel concert at the Blossom Music Center.

## *Flos Campi*

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Born October 12, 1872, Down Ampney

Died August 26, 1958, London

In the 1920s Ralph Vaughan Williams, then in his fifties, wrote a series of works for solo instrument and orchestra, each of them quite individual. In 1924-25, he composed his *Concerto Accademico* for violin and string orchestra, a nod in the direction of the neo-classical movement then so much in fashion. Between 1926 and 1931, he wrote a piano concerto remarkable for its percussive keyboard manner, a concerto so difficult that it was later recast for two pianos and orchestra. In between came the most individual of them all: in 1925 Vaughan Williams composed *Flos Campi* (“Flower of the Field”), a suite for viola and small orchestra. By itself, that might be normal enough, but *Flos Campi* is also scored for a small mixed chorus whose wordless “text” becomes part of the accompaniment. Vaughan Williams then brought a further level of complexity to this music by prefixing each of its six sections with a quotation (in both Latin and English) from *The Song of Solomon*. Some have tried to make out a program in this music and have seen *Flos Campi* as a love-story with the solo viola as the lover who acts out the various Biblical texts with the orchestra. It may be safer, however, to enjoy *Flos Campi* simply as the often serene music it is than to attempt to discern a specific program being acted out in front of us.

*Flos Campi* may be lovely and understated music, but in its quiet way this is also one of Vaughan Williams’ most daring scores. The use of the wordless chorus, for example, is quite original. The composer specifies that it must consist of 20 to 26 singers, and he then details exactly how they should sing: sometimes with lips nearly closed, sometimes with lips closed altogether, sometimes on specific syllables and sounds. The music is also marked by unusual rhythmic freedom: long sections are marked *senza misura*—without measure—where individual performers have the freedom to shape phrases at their own discretion. But the most remarkable feature of *Flos Campi* is its harmonic language. This music does have key signatures, but Vaughan Williams often blurs those keys to the point where the music becomes polytonal. The very beginning, for example, has the solo viola and the oboe in different keys, and this harmonic freedom will mark the entire score. *Flos Campi* is exceptionally gentle music, without overt conflict and rarely rising even to a *fortissimo*, but beneath its glowing surfaces, this is wildly

original music in matters of harmony, rhythm, and sound.

The six sections are played without pause, but listeners may find it useful to know the tempo marking and the quotation from *The Song of Solomon* that prefaces each section:

1. *Lento*: “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters . . . Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love.”
2. *Andante con moto*: “For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.”
3. *Lento (senza misura)*: “I sought him whom my soul loveth, but I found him not . . . ‘I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love . . . ‘Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? That we may seek him with thee.’”
4. *Moderato alla marcia*: “Behold his bed, which is Solomon’s, three score valiant men are about it . . . They all hold swords, being expert in war.”
5. *Andante quasi lento (largamente)*: “Return, return, O Shulamite, Return, return, that we may look upon thee . . . How beautiful are thy feet with shoes O Prince’s daughter.”
6. *Moderato tranquillo*: “Set me as a seal upon thy heart.”

### **Viola Concerto in B minor (arr. Henri Casadesus)**

GEORG FRIDERIC HANDEL

Born February 23, 1685, Halle

Died April 14, 1759, London

Handel never wrote a viola concerto. The Concerto in B Minor is actually by Henri Casadesus, who composed it in the style of Handel and published it under Handel’s name. Casadesus (1879-1947) was a member of the distinguished family of French musicians (he was the uncle of pianist of Robert Casadesus), and he had a lifelong interest in early music and instruments (he owned a fine collection of early instruments, and some of these are today in the collection of the Boston Symphony Orchestra). Casadesus was a violist, and he composed not only the concerto he attributed to Handel but also a Viola Concerto in C Minor that he claimed was by J.C. Bach. Some suspected right from the start that these concertos were by Casadesus,

and he never denied it, but viola concertos are comparatively few, and violists have been grateful for these two concertos: William Primrose and Rudolf Barshai were among the violists who were happy to perform the concerto attributed to Handel. Handel, himself a great arranger, would probably have loved “his” Viola Concerto in B Minor, and today we continue to attribute this music to Handel, even if he did not write it.

Casadesus knew baroque concerto form well, and he carefully preserved it in this music. The Concerto in B Minor is in three movements in the expected fast-slow-fast sequence, and the music demands an accomplished performer: as a violist, Casadesus understood the instrument thoroughly, and this music takes the viola throughout its range and technique. The moderately-paced opening movement alternates a jaunty opening ritornello with extended solo passages, while the *Andante ma non troppo* belongs almost exclusively to the solo viola, which sings this mournful music over subdued accompaniment from the orchestra. The concluding *Allegro* sails along on the energy of its firm main theme. There are varied episodes along the way, but the dancing energy of the principal subject always returns, and finally it drives the concerto to a firm close.

### **Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100**

SERGE PROKOFIEV

Born April 23, 1891, Sontsovka

Died March 5, 1953, Moscow

The premiere of Prokofiev’s Fifth Symphony on January 13, 1945, in Moscow, was one of those storybook tales, almost too good to be true. As Prokofiev mounted the podium, the sound of distant artillery rumbled through the hall. The news had just arrived that the Russian army had smashed across the Vistula River in Poland and was preparing for its final assault on Nazi Germany. After four horrific years of war, the end was in sight—that artillery barrage was the sound of the garrison in Moscow celebrating the now-inevitable victory. And so it was that Prokofiev’s Fifth Symphony was heard for the first time with a prelude of artillery thunder. This music made an overwhelming impression on audiences, both that night in Moscow and around the world in the following months, and it remains today one of the most frequently performed of twentieth-century symphonies.

Prokofiev composed this music in the space of one month during the summer of 1944 at the Composer's House in Ivanovo, an artists retreat 150 miles northeast of Moscow.

Shostakovich was also there that summer, composing two works that many have felt were touched by the war, the Trio in E Minor and Second String Quartet. Prokofiev refused to make a connection between the war and his new work, saying only that he "conceived it as a symphony of the grandeur of the human spirit."

Like Stravinsky and Copland, Prokofiev was not by nature a symphonist, finding himself more comfortable with dance scores and smaller forms—his Third and Fourth Symphonies are based on material he drew from his ballets *The Fiery Angel* and *The Prodigal Son*. Now, however—in the face of a defining national moment—Prokofiev turned to the most serious of orchestral forms and wrote with vision and force. His Fifth Symphony builds across an effective sequence in its four movements: a broad-scaled and conflicted first movement gives way to a propulsive *Scherzo*, which is in turn followed by a painful *Adagio*; the symphony concludes with an almost happy-go-lucky finale that takes themes from the first movement and transforms them to suit its mood of celebration. The symphony's themes are simple, even song-like, its orchestration masterful. Some of Prokofiev's early scores had been brutal in their impact (the young composer had taken delight in outraging audiences), but now at age 53 he handles the orchestra with distinction: the scoring here ranges from the most delicate effects (the majority of its themes are introduced by solo woodwinds) to some of the loudest music ever written. The combination of dramatic content, attractive themes, skillful orchestration, and formal control makes this music almost unique among Prokofiev's works, and one observer has gone so far as to describe Prokofiev's Fifth as "Shostakovich's finest symphony," a remark that—however witty—is unfair to both composers.

The very beginning is deceptively innocent: Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony opens with the pastel sound of two flutes and a bassoon playing the simple opening idea, and the other themes—all introduced quietly and lyrically—appear quickly. This movement is an *Andante* rather than the expected *Allegro*, but while the pace may be measured, it is also inexorable, and the music gathers force as it proceeds. In its closing moments, skies blacken over what had been a generally serene landscape, and the climax is shattering, one of the most impressive in all symphonic music: tunes that had seemed genial on their first appearance now explode as the

strength pent up in those simple figures is unleashed.

The ticking accompaniment heard at the very beginning of the *Allegro marcato* continues throughout—this near-demonic *tick-tock-tick-tock* is so pervasive that the ear seems to hear it even when it is not there. Solo clarinet leads the way in this music, full of rhythmic energy and instrumental color. Much of this color comes from Prokofiev's imaginative handling of percussion, particularly snare drum, woodblock, piano, and tambourine. The piercing sound of oboe and clarinet herald the arrival of the good-natured trio, but the return of the opening material brings a surprise: over the halting (almost suppressed) sound of staccato trumpets, timpani, and pizzicato strings, the opening theme now sounds lugubrious. Gradually the tempo accelerates, and the *Scherzo* smashes its way to the close.

While Prokofiev would not make a specific connection between this symphony and the war that had raged across Russia for three years when it was written, it is hard not to feel that the *Adagio* is touched by the events of those years. This grieving music opens with a simple clarinet melody that quickly turns impassioned, and a range of melodic material follows, including a capacious theme that rises up over a span of four octaves and a grotesque march that sounds like something straight out of a Mahler symphony. Much of the writing here, particularly for the strings, is very high, yet for all this movement's pain, its quiet closing moments are among the most beautiful in the symphony.

The concluding *Allegro giocoso* is well named, for this truly is fast and happy music. Prokofiev re-introduces several themes from the first movement here, but now he transforms them—ideas that had sounded poised in the first movement become rollicking in this finale. Violas lead the way into the main section, full of sweep and high spirits—it takes little imagination to hear the sound of laughter at moments in this music of celebration. The ending is particularly effective. With the music racing along, Prokofiev suddenly reduces his forces to just a handful of players, and for a few moments this mighty symphony becomes chamber music. In the last seconds, the entire orchestra leaps back in for the ear-splitting rush up the scale that drives Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony to its exultant close.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger

## WHY THIS PROGRAM?

By Dr. Melvin Goldzband, Symphony Archivist

**Jan. 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, 2010:-** According to Jahja Ling, “Jeff Rathbun is a very heartfelt person as well as a fine composer. He is the assistant principal oboe of The Cleveland Orchestra. I was in Cleveland when I heard this piece’s first performances by The Cleveland Orchestra, and I was struck by it. This is a suite of three psalms without words, but the music is strong enough to demonstrate what the texts might be.”

Continuing, the maestro noted that Che-Yen “Brian” Chen had the idea of performing two pieces for solo viola and orchestra, one classical/baroque and one from early in the twentieth century. “As one of the many stars of our fine orchestra, he deserves to play whatever he wants, and both of these are beautiful.” As for today’s finale, “The marvelous Fifth Symphony of Prokofiev was overdue here. I first heard the work conducted by Lenny Bernstein at Tanglewood, with the student orchestra. I was blown away, along with the rest of the audience and, also with them, I rushed the stage at the end of the performance. It is one of the most exciting, exacting, accented and biting pieces ever written, and our orchestra ought to do more than justice to it.”

The San Diego Symphony has never before played any music by Jeff Rathbun, and the “Handel” Viola Concerto is being heard here for the first time at these concerts. The Vaughan Williams *Flos Campi* was played once before here, under David Atherton, during the 1982-83 season. Esaba Erdelyi was the viola soloist. Prokofiev’s Fifth Symphony has been programmed here three times before. The SDSO’s first performance was conducted by Charles Ketcham, during the 1979-80 season. The most recent hearing was during the 1995-96 season, under Murry Sidlin.