SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

November 17, 18, and 19, 2006

TALMI **Elegy for Strings, Timpani, and Accordion**

GLAZUNOV Violin Concerto in A Minor, Opus 82
Moderato
Andante sostenuto
Tempo I
Allegro

INTERMISSION

FRANCK **Symphony in D Minor**
Lento; Allegro non troppo
Allegretto
Allegro non troppo

Elegy for Strings, Timpani, and Accordion

YOAV TALMI
Born April 28, 1943, Kibbutz Merhavia, Israel

Local audiences need no introduction to Yoav Talmi, who served as music director of the San Diego Symphony from 1989 until 1996. Mr. Talmi has supplied a program note for this work:

My *Elegy for Strings, Timpani and Accordion (Dachau Reflections)* was inspired by two visits I made years ago to the Dachau concentration camp near Munich in Germany. The first visit was with my wife and children and the second with members of the Israel Chamber Orchestra during our concert tour of Germany (when I served as the Music Director of this ensemble). In a shivering memorial ceremony we held at Dachau, the principal cellist played the *Sarabande* from the *Suite in C Minor for Unaccompanied Cello* by J.S. Bach.

In the process of writing the *Elegy*, I have used different borrowed material, which assisted me in constructing a college of passing images from past and present. The participation of an accordion reflects an image of a street-corner accordion-player in the ghetto. It takes us thus, some sixty years back in the time-tunnel. Once could hear also a Jewish song from the ghetto, played from distance by four ghetto musicians. Uprising of violence and anarchy swallows the song, and it develops into a chaos-scene, which ends in a shrill outcry. The *Sarabande for Solo Cello* by Bach is again in our present time: a lament and reflection on the past. After some anguished moments appears a quotation from Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*: "They sleep and rest as safe as in mother's arms." It serves as a postlude of reconciliation, acceptance and silence. A remembrance.

I have dedicated the *Elegy* to my grandparents–whom I never knew.

The *Elegy* was premiered in September 1997 by the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra in Norway, under my conducting. It has been performed since then in Spain, France, Poland, Latvia, Holland, Germany, Norway, Canada, the United States, and Israel.

Violin Concerto in A Minor, Opus 82
ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV
Born August 10, 1865, St. Petersburg
Died March 21, 1936, Paris

Alexander Glazunov is one of those composers who have virtually disappeared in the

sharp division between nineteenth and twentieth-century music. As a young man, he was friends with Borodin, Balakirev, and Tchaikovsky, he studied with Rimsky-Korsakov, and he was taken to meet Liszt in Weimar. He became director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1905 and lived well into the twentieth century, struggling to maintain standards at the Conservatory during the strange new era of communist rule. If Glazunov's world was transformed politically during his lifetime, it was turned on its head musically. Glazunov had achieved an international reputation as a young composer, but his nineteenth-century idiom was regarded as hopelessly conservative by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and other young Russian composers, and he found himself almost irrelevant in the strange new century. On a long tour of Western Europe, he took an apartment in Paris in 1928 and never returned to Russia. He was virtually forgotten at the time of his death in 1936, though in 1972 his remains were exhumed and returned to Russia, where they were buried with honor.

Glazunov composed his *Violin Concerto* in 1904-05, just as he took over the St. Petersburg Conservatory and just as he was approaching his fortieth birthday. Around him, the world of music was in ferment: at this same moment Debussy was composing *La mer*, Mahler was writing his *Sixth Symphony*, Schoenberg was completing *Pelleas und Melisande*, and Strauss was producing his opera *Salome*, which would send shock waves across Europe. Coming from this moment of musical transformation, Glazunov's *Violin Concerto* is a serenely conservative piece of music, one that looks back to the order of the nineteenth century rather than touching the strange new currents of the twentieth.

This is a virtuoso concerto, full of attractive melodies and demanding some very accomplished playing from the soloist. Glazunov did not play the violin, and he wrote the concerto specifically for Leopold Auer, professor of violin at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and teacher of such violinists as Heifetz, Milstein, Elman, and Zimbalist. Auer gave the premiere in St. Petersburg on March 4, 1905, and the concerto was soon played around the world; Heifetz and Milstein were among its most notable performers. The concerto is compact (about twenty minutes long), and the only feature that might be considered unusual is its structure. Rather than being divided into separate movements, it is in four sections that are played without pause–virtually the entire work grows out of themes announced in its opening section, which then reappear in varied forms in subsequent sections.

Over murmuring woodwinds, the violin soloist enters immediately with the main idea, a

long theme of dark and Slavic character. This is extended briefly before Glazunov presents the second subject, a falling lyric melody marked both *dolce* and *tranquillo*. At just the point we expect the development to begin, Glazunov moves on to the second section, marked *Andante sostenuto*. Set in glowing D-flat major, this section begins with a soaring violin melody that at first seems entirely new (it is in fact related to the opening theme). Gradually the music grows more complex and animated, then proceeds directly into the third section, marked simply Tempo I. Dark lower strings now begin what seems to be the "development": themes from the opening section return and are extended and combined. This section concludes with a long cadenza full of some really wicked writing for the soloist. The orchestra returns, the tempo accelerates, and the concluding section–marked *Allegro*–bursts to life in a great blaze of trumpet fanfares. The writing for solo violin here (and throughout the concerto) is full of technical hurdles like passages played in octaves, long runs, complex chording, artificial harmonics, left-handed pizzicatos. A quick-paced coda rushes the concerto to its exciting conclusion.

Symphony in D Minor
CESAR FRANCK
Born December 10, 1822, Liege, Belgium
Died November 8, 1890, Paris

Franck's *Symphony in D Minor* is so much a part of our musical life that it always comes as a surprise to read the firestorm of criticism that greeted the premiere in Paris on February 17, 1889. Though this music may not seem especially daring today, it set teeth on edge a century ago, as the shrill reactions made clear. One dogmatic professor at the Paris Conservatory cried: "That a symphony? Whoever heard of writing for the English horn in a symphony? Just mention a single symphony by Haydn or Beethoven introducing the English horn. There, well, you see–your Franck's music may be whatever you please, but it will certainly never be a symphony!" Charles Gounod is reported to have said that Franck's symphony was "the affirmation of impotence pushed to the point of dogma."

In retrospect, we can make out some of the features of this music that assaulted traditional sensibilities. The symphony is in three movements, rather than the usual four. Franck writes chromatic melodies throughout, and the obvious influence of Wagner must have grated on the tastes of French academics. Franck was an organist, and he often treats the orchestra like a huge organ, playing off instrumental choirs in great washes of lush sound. This rich sonority

comes from massed unison passages, tremolos, constantly syncopated themes, and the use of such unusual instruments as the English horn, bass clarinet, and two piston cornets. However assaultive these may have been to early audiences, they constitute some of the distinct flavor–and charm–of this music for us today.

In the *Symphony in D Minor* Franck treats themes cyclically–ideas introduced in one movement will return in different forms throughout the symphony. The symphony opens with a slow introduction based on a three-note figure quite similar to the melodic cell that opens Liszt's *Les Preludes*; at the *Allegro non troppo*, this three-note figure, stamped out furiously, becomes the movement's main theme. The second idea of this sonata-form movement is introduced *fortissimo* by both violin sections; sharply-syncopated, it revolves around a constantly-repeating A. The dramatic development leads to a close that treats the opening three-note figure canonically, building it to a climax of apocalyptic fury.

By contrast, the *Allegretto* breathes radiant calm. A brief introduction, played entirely by plucked strings, leads to the famous English horn theme that so outraged early academics, though this *cantabile* melody is so lovely that it is hard to see how it could fail to charm anyone who hears it. The structure of this movement is particularly ingenious, for Franck combines both slow movement and scherzo here, just as Brahms had done two years earlier in his *Second Violin Sonata*. Muted strings suddenly rush ahead on triplet rhythms, and at the climax of the movement Franck deftly combines the opening English horn theme with the scherzo theme.

The finale explodes to life with a brief (and violent) introduction, quickly followed by the flowing main theme in the cellos. This movement too plays out to a climax of tremendous power, and its final moments are especially impressive for Franck's imaginative recall of earlier themes. The gentle English horn melody of the second movement is now stamped out heroically by full orchestra, and then the themes of the first movement reappear very quietly and subtly. The heroic ending, full of ringing full-orchestra sonorities, is built on a canonic extension of the finale's main theme, and the symphony thunders to a roof-shaking close.

Franck was reportedly one of the saintliest human beings who ever lived, and the storm of criticism that greeted the premiere did not bother him in the least. He is said to have arrived home after the premiere and said quietly and simply to his wife that the symphony had "sounded just as I thought it would."

Program notes by Eric Bromberger