

Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
by J. Michael Allsen
Subscription Program No. 4 – Sterling Elliott Returns
January 15-16-17, 2027

No one who attended the January 2025 performance of the Beethoven *Triple Concerto* is likely to forget Sterling Elliott's stunning performance with Gil and Orli Shaham. At these programs, the cellist returns as a soloist, playing the title character of Strauss's tone poem, *Don Quixote*. MSO principal violist Christopher Dosoryst takes the role of the Don's long-suffering sidekick, Sancho Panza. The members of the orchestra are delighted to welcome back Maestro Carl St. Clair, an all-time-favorite guest conductor, who leads this program, opening with a piece by American composer, Frank Ticheli, a gorgeous string orchestra version of his moving choral work *There Will be Rest*. The program concludes with Haydn's cheerful and rustic *Symphony No. 88*.

Ticheli published this moving choral work with a dedication to Carl St. Clair and his family.

Frank Ticheli

Born: January 21, 1958, Monroe, Louisiana,



Rest

- **Composed:** 1999. The string orchestra version heard here was published in 2013.
- **Premiere:** The choral version was premiered by the Pacific Chorale, directed by John Alexander, in Costa Mesa, California, on May 23, 1999. The orchestral version was later performed by the Pacific Symphony, directed by Carl St. Clair.
- **Previous MSO Performance:** This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration:** 6:00.

The original version of this work sets a poem by American lyric poet, Sarah Teasdale.

Background

American composer Frank Ticheli is a familiar name to anyone who has ever played in a concert band—his finely-crafted works have become cornerstones of

the band literature. He has also produced works for chorus, orchestra, and chamber ensembles. Ticheli was trained at Southern Methodist University and did graduate work in composition at the University of Michigan. He joined the faculty of the University of Southern California in 1991 and following his retirement in 2023, was named Emeritus Professor of Music. From 1991 to 1998, he served as composer-in-residence to the Pacific Symphony. His tenure there began shortly after Maestro St. Clair became music director of the Pacific Symphony in 1990.

The orchestral version captures the feeling of the *a cappella* original.

What You'll Hear

One of Ticheli's most moving choral works, *There Will Be Rest*, was written in 1999, and published with a dedication to "the memory of Cole Carsan St. Clair, the son of my dear friends, conductor Carl St. Clair and his wife, Susan." It sets a poem by Sarah Teasdale (1884-1933):

There will be rest, and sure stars shining
Over the rooftops crowned with snow,
A reign of rest, serene forgetting,
The music of stillness holy and low.

I will make this world of my devising
Out of a dream in my lonely mind.
I shall find the crystal of peace, - above me
Stars I shall find.

Ticheli's setting is appropriately serene and comforting. Rising gently from the opening dissonance, it works its way through the first stanza in a mood of tranquil wonder. At the midpoint, the second stanza is only slightly more agitated, mounting to a transcendent passage on the words "above me" and a quiet conclusion. In the string orchestra version heard here, Ticheli has faithfully translated the choral version into an elegant instrumental work.

This lighthearted piece is one of the early symphonic poems with which Strauss established his international reputation as a young composer.



Richard Strauss

Born: June 11, 1864, Munich, Germany.

Died: September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

Don Quixote, Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character, Op.35

- **Composed:** 1897.
- **Premiere:** March 8, 1898, in Cologne.
- **Previous MSO performances:** 1972 (Lowell Creitz, cello, and Marna Street, viola) and 1999 (Alban Gerhardt, cello, and Richard Blum, viola).
- **Duration:** 43:00.

A symphonic poem takes its inspiration and musical form from a story, a visual image, a poem, or some other non-musical source. In this case it is the classic novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, by Miguel de Cervantes.

Background

Strauss, perhaps more than any other late 19th-century composer, was identified with the ideal of program music: music that tells a story, portrays a visual image, or puts across an idea. Strauss himself made contradictory statements about program music, saying at one point that: I don't like programs. They promise one person too much, they exercise too great an influence on another, a third protests that the program has stifled his own imagination, a fourth would rather not think at all..."—*but then again*—"I regard the ability to express outward events as the highest triumph of musical technique." Strauss seems to have resisted written programs for his scores but obviously enjoyed extramusical influences. His preoccupation with musical imagery is clearest in a series of great symphonic poems (a.k.a. tone poems) he composed early in his career: from *Macbeth* (1888) to *Ein Heldenleben* (1898) he created a series of wonderfully picturesque orchestra works that are among the greatest examples of late Romantic programmatic music.

Of all his symphonic poems, *Don Quixote* may be the most obviously descriptive. Though he imposed a classical form on the piece as a whole—theme and variations—it clearly pictures the adventures of Cervantes's Don Quixote and his sidekick (and comic relief) Sancho Panza. This is as close as anyone has ever come

to writing a novel in a musical score, and Strauss exploits a wonderful series of orchestral effects in telling his story. The doleful Don, Sancho and other characters each play their roles with signifying tunes: most prominently, the melody representing Don Quixote himself, most often given to the solo cello. The work met with initial success in Germany, but not every listener was appreciative. In 1899, after *Don Quixote* was played in New York, a reviewer for the *Musical Courier* wrote: “Strauss left harmony and melody a long way behind when he gives the horrible bleating of sheep in the second variation with an effect that is positively earsplitting... It is questionable if such music is not a hundred years in advance of today. A hundred years from now there will be greater knowledge and appreciation of the tremendous crashes that occur in the music that Strauss writes.”

This imaginative piece closely follows Cervantes’s story over the course of ten variations.

What You’ll Hear

In the *Introduction*, we meet the cast: the Don himself, Sancho Panza, and Dulcinea, the beautiful, courteous, and thoroughly imaginary lady who is the inspiration for his quest. It begins with a long episode that portrays Don Quixote in his study, reading books of chivalry and dreaming of doing gallant deeds himself. A beautiful oboe melody in the center of this passage represents Dulcinea herself. He then introduces the main themes: a long Romantic cello melody for the Don, and a series of tunes for Sancho, beginning with tuba and bass clarinet, but dominated by solo viola.

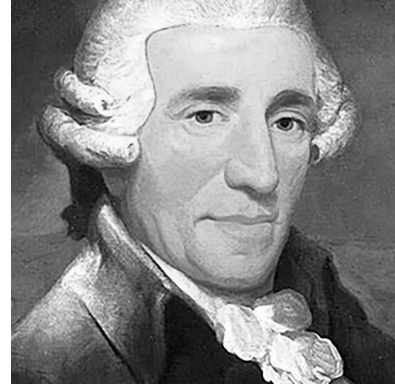
Variation I is based on the most famous episode from *Don Quixote*: the Don sees a group of windmills in the distance and takes them to be monstrous giants. He attacks them with a headlong rush but misses and falls off his horse (listen for a descending run in cello and harp). After praying to Dulcinea, he gets back on to his horse with Sancho’s help and continues his quest. In *Variation II*, Don Quixote and Sancho win a great victory against the army of the evil Emperor Alifanfaron: in reality, a herd of sheep. The “horrible bleating” that the *Musical Courier* reviewer disliked is a fascinating musical effect: woodwinds and muted brass flutter-tonguing for the sheep, who scatter under the Don’s furious attack. *Variation III* is a dialogue between the knight and his squire. The cello, representing Don Quixote and the viola, representing Sancho, argue with increasing heat. *Variation IV* begins with a warlike version of the Don’s theme, as he seeks battle. A group of religious penitents appears (in the guise of a solemn brass chorale), carrying an image of the

Virgin Mary. The Don sees a fair maiden who has been abducted by a band of robbers and rushes to save her, only to be thrashed soundly.

One of the fondest traditions of medieval Courtly Love romances is the sleepless night (or sleepless knight)—where the lover spends an entire night in chaste contemplation of his Lady. *Variation V*, almost entirely a cello solo, shows Don Quixote passionately pining for his Dulcinea. In *Variation VI*, the Don has ordered Sancho to find Dulcinea: a real problem, since neither of them knows what she looks like. Sancho convinces his master that a rather earthy stable girl they meet along the road (a jaunty version of Dulcinea’s oboe theme, with tambourine) is the Lady, who has been transformed into a commoner by an evil magician. The next episode, *Variation VII*, has Don Quixote and Sancho as guests of a “duke” and “duchess”—really a group of laughing peasants—who convince them that they need to take a journey through the air on a magical wooden horse. The two companions ride blindfolded on a hobbyhorse as the peasants create wind with an enormous bellows. Strauss’s music, which calls for a wind machine, seemingly sweeps them up into the sky, as a long-held pedal note reminds us that they never actually leave the ground.

In *Variation VIII*, the knight and squire embark downriver on an oarless boat. They approach a mill and are saved from disaster only when the boat capsizes. They shake out their clothes (string *pizzicatti*), and utter a fervent prayer of thanks (a woodwind chorale). *Variation IX* begins with an excited outburst as the Don spots two evil magicians and rushes to defeat them. The “magicians” are really two monks (bassoons) engaged in a dry academic debate. Finally, Don Quixote’s family and friends step in to stop him. In *Variation X*, a kindly neighbor introduces himself as the Knight of the White Moon, and challenges Don Quixote to a duel (forceful fanfares from brass and woodwinds). The Don is quickly defeated, and as the terms of his surrender must go home and give up knight-errantry. He and Sancho march dispiritedly home to the accompaniment of a solemn drumbeat. He briefly considers becoming a shepherd (an echo of the shepherd’s pipes from *Variation II*), but then they continue on their weary way. In the *Epilogue*, the Don arrives exhausted at home. He thinks about his adventures and dies quietly in bed.

This is one of the mature masterworks Haydn composed between his popular “Paris” symphonies (Nos. 82-87) and the groundbreaking “London” symphonies (Nos. 93-104).



Franz Joseph Haydn

Born: March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Austria.

Died: May 31, 1809, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 88 in G Major

- **Composed:** ca. 1787.
- **Premiere:** Unknown, possibly in Paris.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration:** 23:00.

The story of this symphony is tied up with Haydn’s relationship with his friend, the rather unscrupulous violinist Johan Tost.

Background

Haydn spent much of his career as an employee of the Esterházyes—among the wealthiest and most powerful aristocratic families in the circle of the Emperor in Vienna—and developed his skills and reputation without straying far from his patron’s palaces in Eisenstadt and Eszterháza. But by the 1780s Haydn had gained international notoriety and was beginning to publish his works throughout Europe. He began to attract outside commissions, and one of the most profitable came in 1784 or 1785, when he was asked by a Parisian concert organization to write a set of six symphonies. Haydn immediately agreed, and was a little overwhelmed by the fee, more than he had ever received for his symphonies in the past: 25 *louis d’or*, plus an additional 5 *louis d’or* per symphony. (Making sense of 18th-century money is problematic, but it is safe to say this represented a sizable chunk of change—significantly more than Haydn’s annual salary from Prince Esterházy!) The six “Paris” symphonies (Nos. 82-87) were phenomenally successful when they were performed in Paris during the 1787 season. Haydn, clearly wanting to follow up on this success, dispatched Johan Tost—a violinist in the Esterházy orchestra—to Paris in 1788, with the scores of two new symphonies, Nos. 88 and 89, and instructions to find a good publishing deal. The unscrupulous Tost offered the publisher Jean-Georges Sieber, not two, but *three* symphonies, passing off a symphony by the Czech composer Adalbert Gyrowetz as a work by Haydn. Haydn soon found out about this swindle, but whatever his feelings, all was clearly forgiven in short order, and the composer dedicated three string quartet collections

to Tost: *Opp.* 54 and 55 (1788), and *Op.* 64 (1790). As for the *Symphonies Nos.* 88 and 89, Parisians were probably too swept up in the revolutionary events of 1789 to worry about things like orchestra concerts.

The symphony is in four movements:

- A solemn show introduction, followed by a movement in sonata form.
- A lovely theme and variations.
- A rustic menuet and trio
- A lively sonata/rondo finale based upon a single theme.

What You'll Hear

It opens with a rather serious slow introduction (*Adagio*) in dotted rhythms: it's possible that Haydn, with a French audience in mind, was making a tongue-in-cheek reference to the pompous Baroque French opera overtures of days gone by. If the opening is all powdered wigs and dignified pomp, the body of the movement (*Allegro*) is Haydn at his Austrian countryfied best. The main theme is a rustic country dance, whose offbeat rhythms pervade the entire movement. When the theme is recapitulated after a stormy development section it is fitted with a lively flute filigree. The *Largo* is a gentle set of variations on a theme heard at the beginning. Near the end there is a bit of storm and stress, but Haydn soon restores the delicate opening mood. The *Menuetto (Allegro molto)*, is, typically for Haydn, rough and good humored—just a little too rustic to be an effete aristocratic dance. In the contrasting trio section, drones from horns, bassoons and violas stand in for a country bagpipe. The lively finale (*Allegro di molto*) combines rondo and sonata forms. The humorous main idea, introduced by bassoon and violins, dominates throughout, in all sorts of inventive variations. Near the end, there's a brief, but very funny moment where the entire orchestra seems to fixate on just the two 8th-note pickups to the main theme before the theme is eventually returned for the last time. Haydn saves a surprise for the very end: bringing everything to a screeching halt before launching into a blazing coda.