### VARIOUS

**Yet Another Set of Variations (on a Theme of Paganini)** *(2019)*  
*(SLSO Co-commission)*

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* Denotes variation written for the occasion of Leonard Slatkin’s final concert as music director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, May 19, 1996

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⁵ Commissioned by the Nashville Symphony Orchestra

⁶ Commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra

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**MOZART**  
(1756–1791)  
Oboe Concerto in C major, K. 314 (285d) (1777)  
Allegro aperto  
Adagio non troppo  
Rondo: Allegretto  

Jelena Dirks, oboe

**R. STRAUSS**  
(1864–1949)  
*Ein Heldenleben*, op. 40 (A Hero’s Life) (1897–1898)  
The Hero—  
The Hero’s Adversaries—  
The Hero’s Companion—  
The Hero’s Battlefield—  
The Hero’s Works of Peace—  
The Hero’s Retreat from the World and Fulfillment  

David Halen, violin

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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Jelena Dirks is the Jean L. Rainwater Featured Soloist.  
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Yet Another Set of Variations (on a Theme of Paganini)

BY LEONARD SLATKIN

In 1996 I gave my final concert as music director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. For the occasion, we asked the four composers who were in residence during my tenure to write a variation on the famous theme from the 24th Caprice by Niccolò Paganini. Joseph Schwantner, Joan Tower, Donald Erb, and Claude Baker each offered a different take on the tune. In addition, William Bolcom and I contributed short interpretations of our own.

Although the idea for several composers to create a single variation intended to be performed alongside other arrangements was new, the original theme is probably the most popular classical music tune to be subjected to various treatments. Indeed, Brahms, Schumann, Lutosławski, Blacher, Rachmaninoff, and even Andrew Lloyd Webber have all turned to Paganini for inspiration.

As I approached my 75th birthday, it occurred to me that expanding on this idea from 23 years ago would be a nice way to celebrate. I invited five orchestras where I have held a position of artistic leadership to commission five composers with whom I have shared a close collaboration over the course of my career. Specifically, the SLSO invited John Corigliano to contribute a new variation, as it was with that orchestra that I first conducted and recorded John’s music. Composer Truman Harris served as assistant principal bassoon in the National Symphony and assisted me in orchestrating several works I wrote for that ensemble. Guillaume Connesson was resident composer with the Orchestre National de Lyon during my tenure. Cindy McTee, aka Mrs. Slatkin, was closely associated with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Daniel Slatkin is my son and a composer for motion pictures and television. His variation was commissioned by the Nashville Symphony, one of the most active recording orchestras in the country.

Putting all 11 variations together to form a single piece was not an easy task. I wound up writing an introduction as well as some connective material to cover setup changes in the percussion section. I determined the performance order with an eye toward balancing the serious pieces with the outrageously humorous ones. I am grateful to the various publishers for allowing their composers to sit next to each other in the same work, and to the commissioning orchestras for supporting the project.

A word about my own variation is in order. When I wrote it in 1996, I tried to take an element of each composer’s style and incorporate it into a finale. With five new authors in the mix, I needed to create additional passages so that all 11 contributors would be represented. Most of this material is intended as a little tribute to my friends who so graciously participated in the celebration of this three-quarters-of-a-century milestone. If you keep in mind that my son writes for film and television, Connesson is French, and Harris is a bassoonist, I think you will catch on.

PROGRAM NOTES
First performance: Original Variations: May 19, 1996, Leonard Slatkin conducting the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

Scoring: 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (2 bass drums, chimes, crotales, gallon jug, glockenspiel, maracas, marimba, snare drum, tam tam, tambourine, temple blocks, timbales, 3-tom toms, triangle, vibraphone, water gong, xylophone), harp, piano, off-stage piano, celesta, strings, and tuned crystal glasses played by flutes and oboes

Performance time: Approximately 18 minutes

Oboe Concerto in C major, K. 314

BY DAVID GARRETT

The music of this concerto is more often heard, these days, played on the oboe than on the flute, so it is easy to forget that for years this piece was known only as the Flute Concerto in D. Scholars were aware that Mozart, in spring or summer 1777, had composed a concerto for the oboist Ferlendi (or Ferlendis), who had recently joined the Salzburg Court Orchestra. The following year, in Mannheim, Mozart described how his new friend Friedrich Ramm, the leading virtuoso oboist of the day, had played his “Oboe Concerto for Ferlendis” five times. Obviously Mozart had been pleased with his oboe concerto, particularly as Ramm played it. But the work was thought to be lost.

In 1920, the musicologist and conductor Bernhard Paumgartner discovered in the library of the Salzburg Mozarteum a set of orchestral parts for a concerto in C major for oboe by Mozart, which was obviously an oboe version of his D major flute concerto. The familiar flute version had been prepared in 1778 to fulfill the commission of a Dutch amateur, De Jean, for two flute concertos. Most probably Mozart had composed one (the Flute Concerto in G, K. 313) then, pressed for time, adapted the oboe concerto.

In 1948 Paumgartner edited a published edition of the oboe concerto, and supported it with an article in the Mozart Yearbook (1950). Closer examination confirmed that the Flute Concerto in D is the oboe concerto in disguise: it does not use the full range of notes available on the flutes of Mozart’s day, and the range of the violin part in the orchestra also points to the likelihood of transposition from a C major original.
Those who, observing the idiomatic mastery of the oboe in the quartet Mozart composed for Ramm (K. 370), regret that Mozart did not provide Ramm with a concerto as well, are forgetting that Ramm was probably perfectly satisfied with the concerto originally composed for Ferlendis: this one! The C major concerto is now central to the oboe repertoire.

In either form the concerto is a deft and refined essay in the classical style, with a galant manner. There are many ingenious and witty touches, such as the mock-serious cadence figure with repeated notes and a descending arpeggio which the soloist later extends. Donald Tovey finds opera buffa malice from the second violins, and tutti crowded with contrapuntal and operatic life—typical Mozartian concerto writing, in other words, but never drawing attention to its skill.

The second movement, in F major, is mainly a lyrical cantilena for the soloist, framed by what Tovey calls quasi-heroic gestures from the orchestra. A character in a slightly later opera by Mozart gives the feeling of the Rondo: Blonde, the pert English servant girl in The Abduction from the Seraglio, in whose aria “Welche Wonne, welche Lust” (“Oh what pleasure, oh what joy!”) Mozart returned to a variant of this rondo theme. In the second episode of the Rondo, first and second violins chase one another in a passage in three-part canonic counterpoint, worthy of the ingenuity of an improvising organist, and underpinned by a pedal note on the horns. That’s how it looks on the page—organ is the last thing the listener would think of.

Entertainment and the opportunity for virtuoso display is the keynote here.

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**SLSYO premiere:** March 20, 1987, Monica Johnson as soloist, Leonard Slatkin conducting
**SLSO premiere:** October 12, 2019, Jelena Dirks as soloist, Leonard Slatkin conducting
**Scoring:** solo oboe, 2 horns, strings
**Performance time:** Approximately 21 minutes
Ein Heldenleben, op. 40 (A Hero’s Life)

BY PAUL SCHIAVO

MUSIC’S HEROIC TRADITION
The concept of the artist as hero was one of the central tenets of the Romantic movement, and its expression runs through 19th-century music like a leitmotif. As mentioned above, Beethoven established a model followed by many other composers, using music to intimate dramas of struggle and eventual triumph in a number of his works, most notably his Third, Fifth, and Ninth Symphonies. These compositions exerted a tremendous influence on succeeding generations of musicians. Throughout the 19th century, the most ambitious composers sought in various ways to emulate Beethoven’s example, adopting something of his heroic manner and writing orchestral works with thinly veiled autobiographical programs. Berlioz’s Symphonie fantastique and Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony constitute particularly famous, but by no means isolated, examples of this practice.

Even apart from the music they created, musicians provided the Romantic era with its most vivid examples of the artist-hero. Beethoven, who overcame deafness and other hardships by dint of genius and perseverance, provided a model for this new archetype. Hardly less inspiring, at least to their admirers, were those composers who struggled to assert their progressive artistic ideals against a hostile, conservative public: crusaders like Berlioz, Bruckner, and Wagner. And the artist-hero found yet another manifestation in the careers of virtuoso performers such as Liszt and Paganini, whose feats on the concert stage conquered audiences to a degree matched only by the most popular rock stars of recent years.

As the Romantic movement reached its culmination, the notion of the artist-hero received ever more extravagant musical expression. Wagner’s operatic alter-ego Siegfried and the “Titan” of Mahler’s admittedly autobiographical First Symphony are notable in this regard. But the most unambiguous assertion of the concept came with Richard Strauss’ epic orchestral piece Ein Heldenleben (A Hero’s Life).

A SELF-PORTRAIT?
Written in 1898, this was the last of a remarkable series of tone poems Strauss composed during the final decade and a half of the 19th century. Several of those works, particularly Don Juan and Also Sprach Zarathustra, already had implied certain types of heroic figures and actions. But Strauss left nothing implicit about the heroic theme of Ein Heldenleben, nor about the identity of the hero whose story its music relates—or so it seemed to the work’s earliest critics. They immediately condemned the composition as a blatant and immodest piece of...
self-aggrandizement, even though the composer provided no written program other than the titles of the score’s six sections. Faced with this criticism, Strauss attempted to give a more general interpretation of the piece. “It is enough to know there is a hero,” he said, “fighting his enemies.” The music, however, offered rather conclusive evidence that Strauss indeed fancied himself the title figure: musical quotations from his own earlier compositions presented as emblems of “the hero’s works of peace” in the work’s fifth section.

From our present perspective, it seems hardly important whether or not the composer was waving his own flag. Strauss was a controversial artist, a radical composer in his day, and he had suffered numerous critical slings and arrows. If *Ein Heldenleben* is a fantasy of self-vindication, it is hardly more offensive than Wagner’s conquest of his critics in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, in which the humble but true musician trumps his pedantic rival in a climactic singing contest and wins the girl each desires. Moreover, it is a sentiment easy to identify with. Who, after all, has not indulged in heroic fantasies?

*Ein Heldenleben* unfolds in six broad sections, played without pause. The first introduces the hero of the work’s title in a soaring romantic melody. In the second part, Strauss depicts the hero’s enemies through carping woodwind figures and malevolent harmonies in the low strings. But the hero also has a soul-mate, a Beloved, or Companion, represented in radiant passages for solo violin in the third section. The fourth portion of the tone poem finds the hero confronted by his enemies in some of the most colorful battle music ever composed. Emerging victorious, he now devotes himself to peaceful works for the benefit of humanity. Quotations from *Don Juan*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Death and Transfiguration*, and several other Strauss compositions sound in this fifth section. Finally, his life’s work accomplished, the hero withdraws from the world, serene in the knowledge of his virtues and accomplishments.

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**First performance:** March 3, 1899, in Frankfurt; the composer conducting the Frankfurter Opern- und Museumsorchester.  
**SLSO premiere:** February 27, 1925, Rudolf Ganz conducting  
**Most recent SLSO performance:** September 28, 2013, Stéphane Denève conducting  
**Scoring:** 3 flutes, piccolo, 4 oboes (4th doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, E-flat clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tenor tuba, bass tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tam tam, tenor drum, triangle), 2 harps, strings  
**Performance time:** Approximately 40 minutes
Internationally acclaimed conductor Leonard Slatkin is Conductor Laureate of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Music Director Laureate of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO), and Directeur Musical Honoraire of the Orchestre National de Lyon (ONL). He maintains a rigorous schedule of guest conducting throughout the world and is active as a composer, author, and educator.

In the 2019/20 season, he will celebrate his 75th birthday year with several of the orchestras he has led over the course of his 50-year career, including the St. Louis, National, Nashville, and Detroit Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Orchestre National de Lyon. Other highlights include return engagements with the Houston Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ National Symphony in Dublin, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo; debuts with the KBS Symphony Orchestra in Seoul, NDR Radiophilharmonie in Hannover, and Württh Philharmonic in Künzelsau, Germany; and three weeks in Spain conducting orchestras in Castile-León, Bilbao, and the Balearic Islands.

Slatkin has received 6 Grammy awards and 33 nominations. His recent Naxos recordings include works by Saint-Saëns, Ravel, and Berlioz (with the ONL) and music by Copland, Rachmaninoff, Borzova, McTee, and John Williams (with the DSO). In addition, he has recorded the complete Brahms, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky symphonies with the DSO.


Slatkin has conducted virtually all the leading orchestras in the world. As Music Director, he has held posts in New Orleans, St. Louis, Washington, D.C., London (with the BBC Symphony Orchestra), Detroit, and Lyon, France. He has also served as Principal Guest Conductor in Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Cleveland.
JELENA DIRKS
Jean L. Rainwater Featured Soloist

Appointed Principal Oboe of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in December 2013, Jelena Dirks is the third generation of professional, female musicians in her family. A San Diego native, she grew up in a profoundly musical household. Her mother, retired Chicago Symphony Violist Karen Dirks, as well as her father and maternal grandmother (who were both cellists and stand partners in the San Diego Symphony) made sure music was a part of her life from the beginning. As a youth, Dirks spent many hours dancing ballet and playing the piano, until at age eleven, she ceaselessly begged her parents for an oboe when her soon-to-be first oboe teacher told her “she would make a perfect oboist.”

Dirks was on the faculty of DePaul University from 2005-2014 where she taught both piano and oboe and was the woodwind coordinator. Known for her “luminous solos” (Chicago Classical Review), she is highly sought after as both a teacher and performer, having performed with virtually every major musical group in Chicago, including the Lyric Opera, Chicago Philharmonic, Chroma Chamber Orchestra, and five years of regular performances, tours, and recordings with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She plays chamber music whenever possible and was the oboist for the critically acclaimed Prairie Winds Quintet from 2003-2016. She was also a frequent guest artist on the CSO Chamber Music Series, the Chicago Chamber Musicians, and is a frequent guest artist on the Missouri Chamber Music Festival in St. Louis.

Having graduated summa cum laude with dual Bachelor’s degrees in both oboe and piano from St. Olaf College in Minnesota, Dirks went on to receive dual Master’s degrees in Piano and Oboe Performance from the University of Michigan. She studied with Logan Skelton, A. DeWayne Wee, Doris Koppelman, Alex Klein, Harry Sargous, Merilee Klemp, Peggy Michel, and David McGill among others. While oboe is now the heart and soul of her musical life in St. Louis, the piano still holds a special place as her first love (she can very occasionally be heard practicing when she thinks no one can hear).

Dirks lives in the Central West End neighborhood of St. Louis with her husband, Aaron, a wine professional (they met in the University of Michigan Symphonic Band) and their rescue dog, Bear, who thinks that the possums and squirrels of St. Louis are great fun to chase. All three of them enjoy gardening and restoring their 1895 home together.
LIFT EVERY VOICE
BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION
FEB 21

Harry Potter
IN CONCERT
FILM WITH LIVE SCORE
MAR 20-22

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK
FILM WITH LIVE SCORE
MAY 16-17

The SLSO will not perform on the program with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis.