



ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

Born September 13, 1874, Vienna, Austria

Died July 13, 1951, Los Angeles, California

Verklärte Nacht, op. 4

The setting: A clear, cold, moonlit night. A woman and a man walk in a park. The woman tells the man a story.

In 1899, Schoenberg—poor but surviving—kept busy. Papers lay strewn, remnants of works that would never be completed. Then, seized by white-hot inspiration, he scribbled and scratched until a major new work was complete.

The kindling for this fire came in the form of a poem by Richard Dehmel, *Transfigured Night*. Dehmel was Schoenberg's kindred, straining to break from conservative restraint. His writings are littered with symbolism, sex, nature, and emotional extremes.

In the past, the woman married and had a child with a man she didn't love. She may have been raped. She soon left the man, but remained filled with guilt and shame.

The 35-year-old composer was still on a journey to find his musical voice, and *Transfigured Night* pushes to a new place. In fact, after a private performance, a fellow composer wrote, "It sounds as if someone had smeared the score of [Wagner's] *Tristan and Isolde* while it was still wet!"

Schoenberg's music matches the poem's emotional complexity. The instrumentation—string sextet—thickens the traditional string quartet with an extra viola and cello. Bright colors are rare, but Schoenberg finds infinite shadings of earthy greys and browns.

The man tells her that he understands her situation, and says that their love "will transfigure your child," becoming "my own."

Transfigured Night follows the journey of Dehmel's poem in a single stretch of unbroken music. As such, it can be a challenging listen. The score falls roughly into two halves: 1. The woman struggles to tell her story (dark, minor keys); 2. The man's acceptance (warm, major keys).

At its midpoint comes a moment that stops the heart. Glassy harmonics hover above a bed of plucked strings, evoking the beauty of the moonlit park. Violin and viola sing a duet of surging joy.

First performance: March 18, 1902, by the Rosé Quartet (Arnold Rosé, violin; Albert Bachrich, violin; Anton Ruzitska, viola; Friedrich Buxbaum, cello) with Franz Jelinek, viola, and Franz Schmidt, cello, at the Vienna Music Society

First SLSO performance: May 12, 1999, David Halen and Elisa Barton, violins; Katy Mattis and Susan Kier, violas; and Melissa Brooks and Ilya Finkelshteyn, cellos

Scoring: String sextet (2 violins, 2 violas, and 2 cellos)

Performance time: Approximately 28 minutes

Tim Munro is the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's Creative Partner. A writer, broadcaster, and Grammy-winning flutist, he lives in Chicago with his wife, son, and badly-behaved orange cat.



St. Louis Symphony
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

20
21
141st season

Erin Schreiber, violin
Hannah Ji, violin
Shawn Weil, violin
Beth Guterman Chu, viola
Leonid Plashinov-Johnson, viola
Melissa Brooks, cello
Bjorn Ranheim, cello

Thursday, October 29, 2020 at 7:30pm
Saturday, November 7, 2020 at 7:30pm

R. STRAUSS

(1864–1949)

Sextet from *Capriccio*, op. 85, TrV 279 (1942)

Erin Schreiber, violin
Hannah Ji, violin
Beth Guterman Chu, viola
Leonid Plashinov-Johnson, viola
Bjorn Ranheim, cello
Melissa Brooks, cello

MISSY MAZZOLI

(b. 1980)

Vespers for Violin (2014)

Shawn Weil, violin

SCHOENBERG

(1874–1951)

Verklärte Nacht (*Transfigured Night*), op. 4 (1899)

Erin Schreiber, violin
Hannah Ji, violin
Beth Guterman Chu, viola
Leonid Plashinov-Johnson, viola
Melissa Brooks, cello
Bjorn Ranheim, cello

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Program Notes

By Tim Munro

Day eases into an unsettled night. We peek in on an afternoon chamber music rehearsal at the opening of Richard Strauss's opera *Capriccio*. Missy Mazzoli's *Vespers* conjures a time of day when—once the sun's glow has faded—candles are lit. Arnold Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night* completes the journey, taking us into the unsettled emotions of a couple on a clear, cold, moonlit night.



RICHARD STRAUSS

Born June 11, 1864, Munich, Germany

Died September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

Sextet from *Capriccio*, op. 85

The setting: A plush home near Paris in the 1920s. Sun shines through tall doors. Two men—the composer Flamand and the poet Olivier—listen to a rehearsal of a new musical composition, a string sextet by Flamand.

Richard Strauss' final opera, *Capriccio*, opens with this memorable scene. And today we as listeners sit alongside Flamand and Olivier, listening to this “new” composition.

Strauss subtitled his opera, “A Conversation Piece.” There are many conversations: Flamand and Olivier argue about the relative value of words and music; the Countess and her brother tease each other; an old theater director finds time to whine about the shallowness of young people.

Capriccio allowed Strauss to look back on his professional life. For 50 years he had collaborated with poets and playwrights and theater directors, balancing his needs with theirs, balancing popular appeal with artistic integrity.

The opera also allowed Strauss to ignore the news of his world. *Capriccio* was written and premiered in Germany during the Second World War. Indeed, while bombs fell and people died across several continents, Strauss was able to turn his back.

First performance of the opera: October 28, 1942, at the National Theatre in Munich, Germany

First SLSO performance: October 13, 2006, Nicholas McGegan conducting (string orchestra version)

Scoring: String sextet (2 violins, 2 violas, and 2 cellos)

Performance time: Approximately 12 minutes



MISSY MAZZOLI

Born October 27, 1980, Lansdale, Pennsylvania

Vespers for Violin

“My mission is to connect with people,” Missy Mazzoli said in an interview. “The purpose of creating music is to feel less alone, to create a community around the work to express something that can't be expressed in words.”

Mazzoli's music has been performed by the finest musicians across the globe. In 2018 she became one of the first two women to receive a main stage commission from the Metropolitan Opera and was nominated for a Grammy award. She is Composer-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and from 2012–2015 was Composer-in-Residence with Opera Philadelphia. Upcoming commissions include works for Opera Philadelphia, the National Ballet of Canada, Chicago Lyric Opera, and Norwegian National Opera.

Mazzoli's *Vespers* for violin and electronics emerged from a much larger work: a modern, secular religious work called *Vespers for a New Dark Age*. “I'm not religious,” she said, “but I've always been attracted to the rituals of religion; as a kid, Sunday church was the closest thing I had to an interactive, theatrical experience.”

In *Vespers*, a violin leads its own shadow through an electronic hallway shimmering with bells, organ, and voices. In a text from the larger work, poet Matthew Zapruder captures the tone of *Vespers*: “If the heart makes the sound of two violins sleeping in a baby carriage, then new technologies cannot make the heart more loyal or more free.”

First performance: March 2018, by Olivia De Prato, through streaming video

First SLSO performance: These concerts

Scoring: amplified solo violin with delay and electronic soundtrack

Performance time: Approximately 5 minutes

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