

# Leopold DAMROSCH

SYMPHONY IN A MAJOR  
FESTIVAL OVERTURE  
**SCHUBERT ORCH. DAMROSCH**  
MARCHE MILITAIRE

Azusa Pacific University Symphony Orchestra  
Christopher Russell

# LEOPOLD DAMROSCH, UNSUSPECTED SYMPHONIST

by Christopher Russell

Leopold Damrosch lived two distinct musical careers. The first was in Germany where he was colleagues with some of the most famous musicians of the nineteenth century. The second was in the United States where he had an enormous musical influence on its cultural life, the ramifications of which are still evident today.

Born in Posen, Prussia (now Poznań in Poland), on 22 October 1832, Damrosch was a gifted violinist but his desire to become a musician was met with stern resistance from his parents. Although they eventually relented, Damrosch enrolled in medical school at Berlin University out of a sense of respect for his parents and earned a PhD in medicine in 1854. His violin skills were nonetheless of a standard to attract the attention of Franz Liszt who invited Damrosch to perform with him in Weimar. That was a turning point and his career now focused exclusively on music. He eventually became friends of such luminaries such as Richard Wagner, Hans von Bülow and Clara Schumann. Liszt dedicated his first symphonic poem *Tasso: Lamento e Trionfo* to Damrosch, and both Liszt and Wagner were godfathers to two of his children. Not surprisingly, Damrosch became a musical advocate for both composers – stubbornly so. Once in Breslau, he led a performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* Overture. When it was greeted with hisses, he insisted that the orchestra play it a second time. Only after a third performance did the audience respond positively.

Damrosch's compositions from this time are mostly songs but there is also an opera after Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (the libretto, of his own devising, is bizarrely in German, French and English). Just before leaving for the United States, he composed his *Fest Overture*.

Composed in 1871, the *Festival Overture* <sup>[1]</sup> is dedicated to Georg II Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, who was a fervent patron of the arts. Written in sonata form, the work begins with a noble melody for three trumpets. After building to a climax, the main *Allegro* appears: a fanfare-like theme that confirms the 'festive' nature of the work. The exposition and recapitulation are almost entirely *forte*. The only extended quiet sections appear in the development, where the themes are quietly bounced around the orchestra. The opening melody returns in the fast final section to bring the work to a rousing and triumphant conclusion. The influence of Wagner is strong in this work, most notably *Die Meistersinger*. Some striking harmonic elements are also evident, not least a brass fanfare where the first two chords are a tritone apart.

In May 1871 Damrosch was invited to New York to become conductor of a German male chorus and to make his debut at Steinway Hall as soloist in the Beethoven Violin Concerto. His emphasis in his first few years in the United States was on choral music; he founded the New York Oratorio Society in 1873. In 1876 he was appointed conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra but was replaced after one year because of poor profits. Undeterred, he founded the rival New York Symphony Society in 1878. Damrosch continued to promote new music by conducting various US premieres, among them Brahms' Symphony No. 1 and the Berlioz Requiem. In 1882 he toured the American mid-west with the Symphony Society, going as far west as Denver where he introduced recently completed works by Wagner and Grieg to that part of the world. In 1884 he became conductor of the Metropolitan Opera and proposed an audacious plan to bring German singers to the Met to perform German opera, which at the time was rarely performed in the USA. Although a huge success, it was short-lived since Damrosch died of pneumonia the following February at the age of 52.

Damrosch's children picked up his musical legacy. Walter Damrosch, arguably the best known member of the family, was also Music Director of the New York Philharmonic and was eventually to conduct the world premieres of Gershwin's *An American in Paris* and Piano Concerto in F. His older brother Frank founded the New York Institute of Musical Art, which eventually merged with the Juilliard Graduate School to become the Juilliard School. Damrosch's daughter, Clara Mannes, founded the Mannes College of Music in New York in 1916 along with her husband David Mannes. In honour of the family's musical contributions to the city, part of the Lincoln Center is named Damrosch Park.

Although busy conducting in New York, Leopold still found time to compose major works including a violin concerto, the oratorio *Ruth and Naomi* and the Symphony in A. The Symphony was completed in New York in 1878 but, for reasons that are unclear, the work was neither performed nor published. The manuscript was held in the Lila Acheson Wallace Library of the Juilliard School. In 2005 a critical edition was prepared and edited by Kati Agócs and published by A-R Editions. The world premiere took place on 8 February 2015 with the Azusa Pacific University Symphony Orchestra in California conducted by Christopher Russell.

In the standard four movements, the Symphony is scored for pairs of woodwinds plus contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, percussion and strings. The percussion section consists of timpani throughout, plus gong and cymbals in the third movement only. Although written in New York, Damrosch's Symphony is clearly Germanic in its writing and influence, from the Wagnerian leitmotifs via its granitic Brucknerian moments to the scherzo that has bits of Mendelssohn but also seems to foreshadow Bruckner.

The first movement opens *Poco Andante* with quiet tremolos in the strings [2]. The winds trade off a leaping octave motive that is to become one of the lynchpins of the entire work. The slow opening gives way to the main fast part of the movement, an *Allegro vivace con fuoco* featuring a quick rising melody that ends with another octave leap. Damrosch employs odd key-relations and many tempo-changes, giving the movement a seemingly free-flowing form within a traditional sonata framework.

Rhythmic unpredictability is the hallmark of the short second movement, marked *Intermezzo scherzando* [3]. The rhythmic pulse alternates frequently between 6/8 and 3/4. The music has the flavour of a rustic dance with two-note figures (some are octave leaps again) tossed frequently through the orchestra. Two *tranquillo* sections break up the action but these quiet sections also feature ambiguous harmonies that give the music an unsettled feel. A brief return to the opening *scherzando* brings the music to sudden conclusion.

The emotional heart of the Symphony, the third movement, marked *Quasi Marcia: solenne*, is symmetrically constructed in five parts [4]. The outer sections give the movement its name: it is indeed a 'solemn march'. Although it is in D major, Damrosch quickly adds foreign notes to cloud the harmonies. The work builds to a tremendous climax, which is also the first time the gong is heard. As the dynamic settles down, the opening music of the first movement returns with its quiet octave leaps. Damrosch fills the second and fourth parts, marked *Molto tranquillo*, with quiet contrapuntal and harmonic complexity, leading to a climax in C sharp major. The opening of the first movement again returns but a pair of bassoons leads into the central panel: a *Presto* fugato section for the entire orchestra. The beginning of most of the instrumental entrances here are again the octave leap. The action is the fastest and most manic of the entire work. The movement then turns back on itself with varied returns of the second and first sections. After a tortured harmonic journey, the movement ends softly in the original key of D major.

The brief finale, *Allegro vivace assai*, [5] is in many ways the most conventional movement. It is a relatively straightforward sonata form with a vibrant theme first presented in the clarinet, followed by another iteration of the leaping octave in the violins. After a brief return to the music of the opening movement, the music moves into an extended coda for the triumphant conclusion.

Although Damrosch's Symphony did not receive any performances in his lifetime, his orchestration of Schubert's *Marche militaire* [6] – which began life as the first of the three *Marches militaires*, D733<sup>1</sup> – became a popular concert item. Damrosch undertook the orchestration in 1875 and conducted the premiere two

<sup>1</sup> Schubert scholarship disagrees on the date of composition of the *Marches militaires*: 1818, 1824 and 1825 have all been suggested. The location is not in doubt: Schubert taught music to the daughters of Count Johann Karl Esterházy at their summer home in Zseliz in Hungary (it is now Zeliezovce in Slovakia), and the marches were among a number of teaching pieces he composed there. They were published, as Schubert's Op. 51, by Anton Diabelli in Vienna in summer 1826.

years later, on 10 November 1877 in New York. The work was an immediate success and he conducted it frequently. Damrosch conducted it frequently until the end of his life, not least on his US concert tours. His elaborate orchestration uses a large number of players, including an expanded percussion section. The music begins softly with the main theme in the horns. As the tune is traded between different instruments, the dynamic continually gets louder. Built on the contrasting theme of Schubert's March, the middle section features mostly the woodwinds, punctuated by glockenspiel and various effects in the strings. The main melody returns and the music builds to a massive and colourful finish.

**Christopher Russell** is Associate Professor at Azusa Pacific University (APU) and Coordinator of the Orchestra Program at the Orange County School of the Arts (OCSA). He received his Bachelor's degree in composition from Cal State Fullerton and his Master's degree in conducting from Indiana University. *The Los Angeles Times* has called him 'a forcefully dramatic conductor with a strong technique'.

He has conducted numerous premieres, including the first US performances of works by Tansy Davies, Brett Dean, Jonathan Harvey, Anders Hillborg, Tristan Keuris, Magnus Lindberg, Per Nørgård, Kaija Saariaho and Éric Tanguy. In 2008 he conducted the US premiere of Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Stockholm Diary* for string orchestra with the Azusa Pacific University Symphony Orchestra.

Christopher Russell's musical interests also extend to conducting rarely heard older music, some of it in US premieres. They have included three British symphonies: Havergal Brian's 27th (1966) and 32nd (1968) and Robert Simpson's Seventh (1977). His performance of the Fifth Symphony (1926) by the Danish composer Rued Langgaard was the first complete performance of any of Langgaard's sixteen symphonies in the United States. He conducted the American West Coast premiere of Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 7, the first US performance in over thirty years of a symphony by the Swedish composer Allan Pettersson and in 2015 conducted the world premiere of the Symphony in A composed in 1878 by Leopold Damrosch. He guest-conducted at the MasterWorks Festival in Indiana and at the MasterWorks China Festival in 2015.

He has recorded on the MMC Recordings label, performing works ranging from Gluck and Beethoven to Stucky and Lindberg with the OCSA Symphony, music of Frederick Fox with the



Indiana University New Music Ensemble and conducting a string orchestra of APU Symphony students for the recording *The Pursuit of God* with Christian recording artist Tommy Walker along with LA Philharmonic violinist and APU faculty member Ingrid Chun.

He is a regular pre-concert lecturer for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Philharmonic Society of Orange County.

**Azusa Pacific University (APU)** is a leading Christian college ranked as one of the nation's best colleges by *U.S. News & World Report* and *The Princeton Review*. Located near Los Angeles in Southern California, APU offers associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctoral and degree completion programs, both on campus and online.

The APU Symphony repertoire includes an extremely wide range of music, from Baroque to new works. Under Christopher Russell, the Music Director since 2008, they have performed symphonies by most major composers including Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner, Dvořák, Haydn, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Nielsen, Prokofiev, Schubert, Schumann, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky. The orchestra has performed many world and United States premieres.

Some of today's foremost composers including, Brett Dean, Anders Hillborg and Steven Stucky, have coached the orchestra on their compositions.



**Violin**

Ismael Oliveira, concertmaster  
Marta Pawlowska, concertmaster  
Lydia Sewell, principal second violin  
Denise Amorim  
Jamee Bollinger  
Carol Campos  
Tarn Lertsukon Dooley  
Mason Haynie  
Tiffany Ho  
Alexandra Jackson  
Miri Jeon  
Kelsey Kepple  
Andrzej Kunecki  
Chloe Mackay  
Lily Mackay  
Alexandra Macalalad  
Cristin McIntire  
Kimberly Sahagun  
Ana Schmidt  
Alicia Williams  
Tawny Williams

**Viola**

Hyojoo Uh, principal  
Lila Crosswhite  
Adrian Grijalva  
Rebecca Lester  
Yuyao Li  
Elyssa Ojiri  
Hailey Walterman

**Cello**

Susanna Kwon, co-principal  
Ashley Ng, co-principal  
Daniel Atwell  
Jane Huang  
Natalie Kepple

**Paige Normann**

Kun Liu  
Gamma Ma  
Daniel Mackay  
Jared Storz  
Haoxuan Yu  
Lingling Zou

**Double-Bass**

Kraig Long, co-principal  
Daniel Pina, co-principal  
Spencer Baldwin  
Bryan McKenzie  
Hunter Van Dam

**Flute**

Trevor Dolin  
Hannah Dyslin  
Gavin Furuken

**Oboe**

Ellen Hummel, co-principal  
Ramon Thiago, co-principal  
Rémy Kepler

**Clarinet**

Annaka Price, principal  
Amber Villanueva  
Joseph DiFiore

**Bassoon**

Spencer Evans, principal  
Braxton Porter

**Contrabassoon**

Sara Goya

**Horn**

Jenny Ortiz, principal  
Michael Edwards  
Gilbert Padilla  
Noam Shanker  
Seth Velez

**Trumpet**

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Connie Benjamin  
Brian Cerjak  
Samantha DeBie

**Trombone**

Daniel Doniza, principal  
Peter Albano  
Armando Duenas

**Tuba**

Daniel Garcia  
Robert Murray

**Percussion**

Eugene Ahn  
Stephanie Chung  
Jonathan Schlitt  
Bo Steele  
Joseph Verbal

**Harp**

Jessica Brizuela



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