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Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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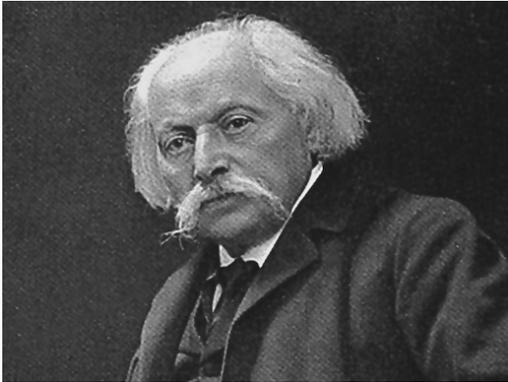
Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, March 7th, 2015, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

1915: Karl Goldmark

Karl Goldmark (1830–1915). [*Overture to Penthesilea*](#) (1879)

Goldmark. [*Violin Concerto No. 1*](#) (1877)



Continuing our survey of the year 1915, we find one of the few people of the time—composers, critics, or audience members—who liked both Brahms *and* Wagner, and that's Karl Goldmark. A Hungarian composer trying to make his way in Vienna, he took on other jobs in and related to music. One of those jobs was music criticism. He had good things to say about each of the two titans of the time, who were heralded by disciples (usually more zealous than their supposed leaders) as the only way forward in music. Goldmark had character enough to look beyond the warring schools of taste, beyond the Brahmsians and Wagnerites forever excommunicating each other from the world of accepted culture. He saw the real music in each.

Karl Goldmark was born in 1830 and died in 1915, and although he studied the violin and supported himself playing in theater orchestras, he seems to have taught himself composition just as he had taught himself to play the piano. The first concert of his own works in the blinding light of Vienna—the musical capital not just of Austria but of the world—was a bust, and he left town for two years, returning to his home country and studying the scores of Bach, Mozart, and others. Then he came back to Vienna, and this time he stayed. Within a few years Goldmark wrote three works that made his career and made him famous. One of those we'll hear today.

His opera *The Queen of Sheba*, on an invented plot built on the biblical story of the queen visiting King Solomon in Jerusalem, was an immediate success in 1875. He had been working on it since the early 1860s, but his struggles with the libretto and music paid off. He even changed the happy ending to a tragedy, and audiences loved it. *The Queen of Sheba* was an international success, and stayed in the Viennese repertoire decades after his death.

That same year he composed the *Rustic Wedding Symphony*; it premiered in 1876, was also was a hit, and is still played today. Brahms, on a hike with Goldmark after the premiere, and months before Brahms's own First Symphony premiered, said, "That is the best thing you have done; clear-cut and faultless, it sprang into being a finished thing, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter."

Goldmark then wrote the work that was to be his most-performed piece during his lifetime, the Violin Concerto No. 1. After his death it fell out of the repertoire, but a number of fairly recent recordings have brought it back into favor. Its resurgence is well deserved, for it combines technical brilliance with lush melodic writing and a bubbling orchestration.

From just two years later, the *Overture to Penthesilea* is based on the dramatic retelling by Heinrich von Kleist of the Trojan myth of Achilles and the Amazon queen, Penthesilea. It is filled with color and orchestral fireworks, yet has clear form and exact, careful writing for the instruments. Listening to *Penthesilea*, we may be forgiven if we consider this the kind of music one might compose if one liked both Wagner *and* Brahms.