

PRINCETON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Fall 2002

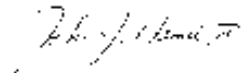
Welcome to our 23rd Season! You will be delighted with the world-class caliber of Princeton's own symphony orchestra.

Breathtaking classical performances, uplifting family concerts, and our self-supported school music program, BRAVO!, make the PSO a community resource unlike any other in our area.

The Board of the Princeton Symphony Orchestra is committed to expanding the number of performances and increasing the overall presence of our truly remarkable ensemble. To do this we need sufficient financial strength to try new things and make experimental efforts. I ask you, therefore, to be as generous as possible this season to ensure these efforts are made.

Thanks to the many, many friends who support our fine orchestra and keep the PSO a favorite feature of the musical scene in the Princeton area.

Enjoy the music!



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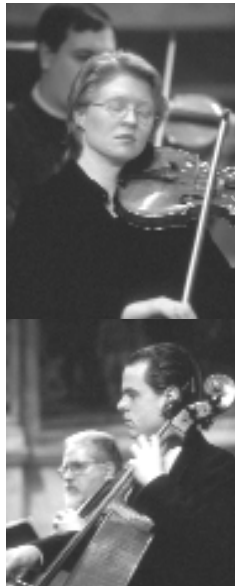
At the Montgomery Center for the Arts' 1860 House

All performances at 4:00 pm

- October 13, 2002**
- November 10, 2002**
- December 8, 2002**
- February 2, 2003**
- March 9, 2003**
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When two of the area's finest cultural institutions team up with another "institution" named Mozart, the result is unbridled delight on a Sunday afternoon. PSO Music Director Mark Laycock personally prepares each of the six small ensemble programs featuring the classical master's most intimate, and some say, most passionate works. Performed by the critically acclaimed musicians of the Princeton Symphony Orchestra, this series is presented in the intimate and comfortable setting of the

Montgomery Center for the Arts' historic 1860 House. Save 33% over the single ticket price when you subscribe to all six, or design a 3-pack to suit your schedule and save 20%.



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December 15, 2002, 4:30 pm

A Princeton tradition that brings audiences to their feet! Join us for holiday favorites, special guests, and be sure to warm up those vocal chords for the annual sing-along! **PSO POPS!** delights the young and young-at-heart, the seasoned connoisseur and the first-timer. Always a hot ticket (and a great gift idea), so order early.

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Back by popular demand: A pre-concert party for young tots. Kids don their holiday finery and bring their favorite stuffed pillow pal for treats, hot chocolate, photos, and hilarious fun offered up by PSO Principal Tuba Gary Cattley. Proceeds benefit our children's educational outreach program, BRAVO!



Princeton Symphony Orchestra in Richardson Auditorium

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PRINCETON
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

2002 2003

Program

PRINCETON
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2002, 4:00 P.M.

MARK LAYCOCK, Conducting
Vladimir Ovchinnikov, *Piano*

Laycock

American Fanfare (Premiere)

Bartok

Dance Suite for Orchestra

Rachmaninoff

Concerto No.3 for Piano and Orchestra

- I. Allegro ma non tanto
- II. Intermezzo
- III. Finale

VLADIMIR OVCHINNIKOV

INTERMISSION

Stravinsky

Suite from "The Firebird" (1919)

- I. Introduction – L'oiseau de feu et sa danse
- II. Ronde des princesses (Khorovode)
- III. Danse infernale du roi Katscheï
- IV. Berceuse
- V. Finale



Large print programs available by request.

This program is funded in part by the New Jersey
State Council on the Arts/Dept. of State



2002 2003

Program

Princeton Symphony Orchestra



MARK LAYCOCK, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Now in his seventeenth season as music director, Mark Laycock has deftly shaped the Princeton Symphony Orchestra into a mature and acclaimed ensemble, reflecting his elegance, wit, and precision. He is well known for his innovative programming and his ability to provide the audience with an understanding and accessibility to the music that remains unique in the concert going experience. Mr. Laycock was initially trained as a violist under the tutelage of the

Curtis String Quartet. In 1979, he won the Leopold Stokowski Memorial Conducting Competition and the opportunity to conduct the Philadelphia Orchestra. He was then twenty-one and the second youngest ever to conduct that orchestra. He carries the distinction of being the only non-Russian invited to appear at the Moscow Autumn Festival, performing at Tchaikovsky Hall in 1988, and has conducted the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall and the Barbican Centre, London. Mark Laycock was music director of Orchestra London Canada from 1995 to 1998. In November 2000 he was appointed Assistant Conductor of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and was subsequently promoted to Associate Conductor at the beginning of the 2001-2002 season, a post he continues to hold simultaneously with his PSO music directorship. In addition, Maestro Laycock appears frequently as a guest conductor with some of North America's most prestigious orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. In December 2001 he made his debut to great acclaim at the famed Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

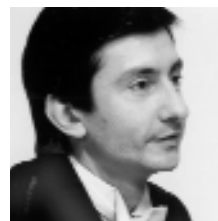
ABOUT THE PRINCETON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Whether performing the classical masterworks or introducing music by the most innovative contemporary composers, the Princeton Symphony Orchestra is widely regarded as one of the region's finest musical organizations, renowned for its excellence in presenting unusual and challenging programs. The Princeton Symphony Orchestra is greater Princeton's only resident professional orchestra and performs its subscription series in Princeton University's beautiful and historic Richardson Auditorium. Last season PSO performed the American premiere of *Daylight Divine* by Augusta Read Thomas, and in past seasons presented *American Salute* July 4th concerts, annual Holiday Pops concerts, a Waterloo Festival Concert and the Millennial Celebration of Sacred Music, including the Festival of Hymns and the All-Bach New Year's Day program. PSO also produces *BRAVO!*, an educational outreach series with performances in schools, at Richardson Auditorium, and the State Theater in New Brunswick.

Founded in 1980 by the late Portia Sonnenfeld, the Symphony was originally comprised of amateur music lovers in the Princeton area who presented two or three informal concerts each year. The Princeton Symphony Orchestra was restructured as a professional group in 1983 and, under the leadership of Mark Laycock since 1986, has developed into an incredibly versatile ensemble, with the ability to shift styles dramatically and perform a wide variety of orchestral works ranging from the sixteenth century to the present, from classical to jazz. The artists and soloists who have appeared in concert with the PSO include the Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble, the American Boychoir, Leon Bates, John Chancellor, John Cheek, Linda Hohenfeld, Joan LaBarbara, Chantal Juillet, Emily Mann, Bernard Rands, Sharon Sweet, Tania Leon, Joel Quarrington, Anthony Hewitt, Arve Tellefsen and Representative Rush Holt.

Guest Artist

Princeton Symphony Orchestra



VLADIMIR OVCHINNIKOV, piano

Vladimir Ovchinnikov studied with Alexey Nasedkin at the Moscow Conservatoire. In 1980 he was awarded the second place to Ivo Pogorelich in the Concours International de Montreal and in 1982 won the joint Silver Medal with Peter Donohoe in the Moscow Tchaikovsky Piano Competition. In 1987 he won First Prize at the Harvey's Leeds International Piano Competition, which

was followed by a triumphant debut recital at the Barbican; in 1993 he made his Proms debut with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Yakov Kreizberg.

Mr. Ovchinnikov has given recitals in many major European and North American cities and has been invited to appear at such festivals as Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, Hollywood Bowl, Lichfield, Manchester *Glories of the Keyboard*, Schleswig Holstein, Sintra, Stresa, Swansea and Van Cliburn at Fort Worth.

Vladimir Ovchinnikov appears regularly with such leading Russian orchestras as the Moscow Philharmonic, Moscow Radio Symphony and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic. He also has a long-standing relationship with the Russian State Symphony Orchestra and Yvegnny Svetlanov with whom he has toured France, the Netherlands and North and South America. Concerto appearances in Europe and North America have included BBC Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Danish Radio Symphony, Hague Residentie, Hallé, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Montreal Symphony, National Symphony of Wales, Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia, Polish National Radio Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, Slovak Philharmonic, Ulster Orchestra and Zurich Tonhalle. He has played under such conductors as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Matthias Bamert, Rudolf Barshai, Vladimir Fedoseyev, Claus Peter Flor, Mariss Jansons, Neeme Järve, Alexander Lazarev, Libor Pesek, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, Petri Sakari, Yuri Siminov, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Sir Georg Solti, Walter Weller and Takuo Yausa.

Vladimir Ovchinnikov records regularly for Melodiya. He has recorded albums of Liszt, Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff for EMI Classics and Shostakovich First Piano Concerto with Maxim Shostakovich together with *Pictures at an Exhibition* for Collins Classics.



In an age when “20th Century Music” must now be classified as music history, today’s opening concert of the Princeton Symphony Orchestras’ 2002-2003 season begins with an all 20th and 21st century program. This program also carries the distinction of being truly “American,” as each composer represented was either born in the United States or came here to live.

An interesting convergence of time and place can be seen in the three works that follow the first performance of *American Fanfare*. In the year 1909 Igor Stravinsky, young and little-known, began work on his first major work, a ballet which would launch him on an amazing international career when first performed in Paris the following year; in the same year the somewhat older, well-established Sergei Rachmaninoff would compose his third and finest piano concerto in preparation for his concert debut in the United States, effectively bringing to a close the span of the great 19th century keyboard concerto, although he would continue to compose in the grand Romantic manner until his death in 1943. Around the same time Bela Bartok, although only a year older than Stravinsky, began to compose his first major works drawing directly upon his experience studying Hungarian folk music, much as Stravinsky absorbed direct influences from Russian folk music in his early works. But unlike the other two men, Bartok only began to come to international notice after the appearance of his *Dance Suite*, first heard in 1923.

The three composers would all tour the United States in the ‘20s and ‘30s, eventually taking refuge here from the disruptions of revolution and fascism in their European homelands. Bartok would live out the final five years of his life in New York City, while Stravinsky settled in Los Angeles, later joined there by Rachmaninoff.

The folk traditions of their respective homelands were to have varying degrees of influence upon these composers, as well as important links with earlier generations of musicians and cultural traditions. What is perhaps most remarkable about these three figures is that until the middle of the 19th century there was little or no tradition of concert music in their home countries whatsoever. By the middle of the 20th century two of them, Stravinsky and Bartok, had come to occupy positions of supreme importance in the world of music.

American Fanfare (2002)

MARK LAYCOCK (1957 -)

American Fanfare was written in the summer following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. It is dedicated to what has always been and will always be the strength, compassion, faith, and resolve that defines the American spirit. The opening four-note motive proclaims the name “America,” and runs as a thread throughout the work. It is scored for full orchestra.

Dance Suite (1923)

BELA BARTOK (1881-1945)

The *Dance Suite* is a vivid reminder of Bartok’s profound relationship with the folk culture of not only his native land, but of Eastern Europe and the Middle East as well. Unique among composers, he was a serious student of folk music, a veritable “Ethno-musicologist” (to use a word which did not exist in the early years of the 20th century), when he and his friend Zoltan Kodaly went on field expeditions to collect folksongs, making use of the primitive cylinder recording apparatus which had just been developed.

Bartok’s “native land” was Hungary, of course, but quite a different Hungary from the independent nation that came into existence with the dissolution of the “Austro-Hungarian Empire” in 1918. Until that date Hungarian culture remained cloaked in obscurity. Among many composers and music-lovers (especially in Vienna), there was a sentimental fondness for “Hungarian” music, as is famously known from Brahms’ *Hungarian Dances* and many of the popular late 19th century Viennese operettas. Of course, the whole world celebrated Franz Liszt as the essence of Hungarian music, most of all for his brilliant *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. But Liszt spent little time in his native land after his teens, and as an older man struggled to speak the language. Like Brahms, and many other musicians of the day, Liszt believed that the music of the Hungarian gypsies was indeed *the* authentic Hungarian music, even taking time to write a wonderfully misinformed book! It was only twenty years after the death of Liszt that Bartok and Kodaly were able to establish that genuine Hungarian music was quite another matter from the music heard in restaurants in Vienna and Budapest, for the most part played and created by gypsies, who belonged to a distinct tradition of their own. Bartok’s scholarly approach to the subject (in contrast to the enthusiasms of Liszt and Brahms) not only clarified the true nature of Hungarian folk music, but also began to reveal the enormous range and vitality of the music of Romania, Bulgaria and other hitherto unknown regions of the sprawling Austro-Hungarian Empire as well.

Although strongly devoted to the goal of Hungarian political and cultural independence, Bartok’s involvement with folk music was remarkably open-minded and internationalist, as is exemplified in his *Dance Suite*. For all its folk music influences, this work was actually composed for a uniquely “urban” occasion: The celebration in 1923 of the 50th anniversary of the union of three sister cities on the banks of the Danube, Buda, Obuda and Pest, to form the capital city of Budapest. That Bartok was commissioned to compose a work by the conservative authorities of Budapest was rather curious, considering the composer’s own left-wing leanings in the early years of independence. The early 1920s were a period of great political unrest, the newly independent nation having flirted briefly with Communism in 1919, then swinging into extreme right-wing political unrest, inflation and falling living standards. At the time, Bartok came under attack by some nationalists as “unpatriotic” due to his work with Romanian and Slovak folk music, as well as his

own political views. The suite was first heard on November 19, 1923, on a concert conducted by Ernst von Dohnanyi, which also included commissioned works by Dohnanyi himself, and the sensation of the evening, Zoltan Kodaly's brilliant *Psalmus Hungaricus*.

The *Dance Suite* consists of six dance movements (mostly in quick tempo), several of which are linked by a *ritornello*, a gentle, lyrical passage which Bartok, rather pleased with himself, described as "such a faithful imitation of a certain kind of Hungarian folk melody that its derivation might puzzle even the most knowledgeable of musical folklorists." That said, Bartok went on to point out that no actual folk material was employed in the composition.

The opening movement, marked *Moderato*, is described by Bartok as having links with Arab music. The initial melodic pattern in the bassoon is the sort of "compressed" figure common to much of Bartok's music, circling around a tightly-knit sequence of close intervals (half steps, seconds and thirds), heard against a heavily-accented, irregular rhythmic background (another typical Bartokian mannerism). The strings play in choppy down-bow strokes joined by the percussive interjections in the piano. The bassoon figure is passed on to English horn, clarinet and oboe, often played in seconds (anticipating the famous *Game of the Couples* movement from the *Concerto for Orchestra* written twenty years later). Swooping *glissando* figures appear in the strings, the orchestral texture thickens, chugging forward in heavy accents. There is a charming moment when the bassoon melody is heard in the tuba. Then the *ritornello* steals in, comfortably set in G minor (Aeolian mode), a sweetly nostalgic moment forming a link to the next movement.

The second movement, *Allegro Molto*, said to be derived from the Hungarian tradition, stomps into view in B-flat minor, loud, heavily weighted with the brass, obsessively centering upon the interval of the minor third. The rhythms become ever more irregular, displaying a wildness reminiscent of similar passages in the composer's *Miraculous Mandarin*. The *ritornello* reappears, a bit less sweet this time, now set in E-flat.

In the third movement "Hungarian, Romanian, and even Bulgarian influences alternate," according to the composer. Marked *Allegro Vivace*, this is effectively the work's *scherzo* set in a strongly pentatonic key of B, making much use of the so-called "Hungarian interval," the perfect fourth. Laid out in a *rondo*-like scheme (A-B-A-C-A), the opening "bagpipe" tune introduced by the bassoon moves around the orchestra, rising in intensity, followed by the "B" section in which a drone-like tune is punched out in the strings. The second appearance of the "A" tune creates a "music-box" effect in a magical passage with the piano (played by two performers, four-hands) circling around in a four-part canon, laid out against a background of harp and harmonics in the strings. The "C" section is another heavy-footed passage in the strings over a drone figure, soon joined by shrill, swirling high winds, bringing back the "A" theme for a brilliant finish.

At this point there is no *ritornello*. The slow fourth movement (*Molto Tranquillo*) emerges *pianissimo* from a moment of silence. Characterized by Bartok as "entirely Oriental (Arab) in character," this is an example of the hushed, haunted slow music so memorable in the composer's later works. Opening with richly textured sonorities in the strings alternating with chant-like melodic figures in the winds, here the fluid, unaccented rhythmic flow of the music creates an atmosphere of mysterious stillness. Malcolm Gillies has described this as "a music that just *is* rather than one that progresses. It exists in time rather than moves through time."

Introduced by the briefest of the *ritornello* passages, the short fifth movement (*Commodo*) is described by Bartok as having "a primitive peasant character." Little more than an introduction to the final movement, here a pulsating repeated-note figure is heard in the violas, then reiterated with added sonorities of the ("Hungarian") perfect fourths, rising in tension to outbursts in the winds and brass, then striding without a break into the finale.

The sixth movement, *Allegro*, extends the repeated-note figure from the previous section, with another "pile-up" of fourths rising from the cellos and basses into the upper strings and winds. This finale is sometimes described as a "medley," with quotations from the earlier movements passing in review and in various combinations, reaching a grand climax, only to settle back into a last recollection of the *ritornello*. The coda begins with a simple peasant-like tune in solo strings, soon builds to another towering sonority, with the "bagpipe" tune of the third movement returning to bring the proceedings to a resounding conclusion.

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 30

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Rivaling Rachmaninoff's acclaim as a composer were his accomplishments as a concert artist, which rapidly won him fame as one of the finest performers of the day. It was in preparation for his debut as both pianist and composer in the United States that the *Third Piano Concerto* was composed in 1909. The concerto received its world premiere at Carnegie Hall on November 28, 1909, with the New York Symphony conducted by Walter Damrosch. A rather more auspicious performance at Carnegie followed on January 16, 1910, with the New York Philharmonic under Gustav Mahler, who had been so deeply impressed by the concerto that (in that era before unions) he insisted upon extending the dress rehearsal by ninety minutes to do justice to the complexity of the work. Rachmaninoff marveled at Mahler's attention to detail, and precise integration of the piano and orchestral elements, which resulted in a performance that he remembered as the finest of his career. Thirty years later Rachmaninoff, as soloist, completed his cycle of the concertos in a recording made in 1940 with his favorite orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy.

Sergei Rachmaninoff's first two piano concertos were freely modeled upon the celebrated B-flat minor *Concerto* of his beloved Tchaikovsky, opening with full-throated lyrical melodies, the piano part closely interwoven with elaborate and richly colored orchestral writing. The *Third Concerto*, an altogether more intricate and large-scale musical structure, opens with a simplicity and directness not heard since the Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto*. Against an accompaniment figure whose rhythmic elements, hardly noticed at first, will increasingly take on importance throughout the concerto, the soloist unfolds an plaintive melody of almost folk-like character, naïve in its rhythmic character, diatonic in its musical language. While the musical argument will soon take on a complexity and sheer weight which is unique to this concerto, the truest expression in the work is always found in those moments when the composer returns to the simplicity of this opening.

With a quickening of tempo the main theme is taken over by the violas and horns against a delicate tracery of passage work in the piano. The tempo quickens yet again, the virtuoso piano writing begins to push aside the lyrical flow of the main theme, building in excitement and richness of detail. Settling down into a slower tempo (*moderato*), the second subject draws together a number of contrasting elements, at first giving voice to a powerful lyrical outburst by the strings, then moving into a *scherzando* passage, with *staccato* writing in the strings in dialogue with the piano. This is soon transformed into a smoothly flowing episode in the piano alone (in B-flat), joined by the orchestra, increasing in fullness of texture and harmony. The exposition is then rounded out, still in B-flat, in classical fashion returning to the music that opened the movement, at first back in the home key of D minor, the principal theme recalled for a moment in its original uncomplicated form. Suddenly becoming agitated, a new figure (*staccato* thirds in winds and piano) is introduced, pressing on into increasingly urgent triplet passagework in the piano, soon breaking into a wild passage in which the *staccato* thirds are now dense chords in the piano over the primary rhythmic element from the very beginning of the movement.

Following a tradition dating back at least to Beethoven, Rachmaninoff writes out his own *cadenza*, but with an unusual twist. The original version of the *cadenza* is printed in the score of the concerto, curiously marked "*ossia*," a term which usually denotes a somewhat simpler, alternate version of a technically challenging passage. In this case, however, the *ossia* is actually the rather more challenging longer version. While Rachmaninoff himself may have performed this version in his earlier years as a concert artist, in the 1940 recording he chose to use the shorter version, possibly to accommodate the time limitations common in the age of the 78 rpm recordings. (Vladimir Horowitz also preferred the shorter *cadenza*.)

In today's performance Vladimir Ovchinnikov will play the longer version.

It is worth noting that after the first 55 bars (first 39 of the shorter *cadenza*), both versions become identical, soon moving into an episode in which the *cadenza* is shared with solo wind instruments heard in short solo passages accompanied by the piano: Flute, then oboe, clarinet, finally the horn. In a quite original touch,

Rachmaninoff introduces brief passages for solo wind instruments into the latter portion of the *cadenza*, sharing the moment with solo flute, oboe, clarinet, finally horn.

While the term *intermezzo* is often applied to a rather lightweight, usually lyrical movement, often taking the place of a more animated *scherzo*, in this case the *Intermezzo* acts as a deeply introspective interlude linking the massive outer movements. Even for a composer given to expressions of melancholy feeling, the lengthy orchestra introduction to this movement is unusually somber and inward turning. The piano enters with a mood-breaking splash of color and virtuosity, then settling into the warm key of D-flat for the principal theme of the movement. This soon moves into darker harmonic colors with a remarkably extended passage that hovers over a long sustained pedal F. (It is sometimes suggested that the main part of the movement is a freely composed theme and variations.) Breaking away into shifting harmonic territory, the tempo quickening and emotional tone heightened and impassioned, the main theme becomes ever more insistent, finally returning to the key where it had begun, D-flat. Unexpectedly (taking his cue from the slow movement of the Tchaikovsky first *Concerto*), Rachmaninoff lifts the music into the more transparent tonality of F-sharp minor. Stepping into a rapid 3/8 meter, the effect is of a will-o-the-wisp *scherzando* episode that, all too soon, gives way to the earlier atmosphere of sorrow and aching emotional expression to end the movement. Sidestepping a conventional conclusion, the piano instead moves assertively forward in a brilliant *cadenza*-like passage to launch the finale without a pause.

Where the first movement is predominantly lyrical and the *Intermezzo* elegiac, the finale is most notable for its rhythmic vitality and irresistible momentum. Bounding off, brimming with energy, the principal theme is an uncomplicated chordal statement in the piano set against a galloping background in the winds (with faint hints of rhythms heard in more relaxed surroundings at the beginning of the concerto.) A sturdy "transitional theme" follows, the piano writing suggesting the rather "military" style found in such popular Rachmaninoff pieces as the *Prelude in G Minor*. The recapitulation, opening in C minor, follows fairly closely the earlier sequence of elements, with even greater momentum and excitement. Of particular note is the lyrical expansion of the syncopated secondary element, now with even more urgent expressive power, the sweeping melodic line in the piano now riding over softly pattering repeated eighth notes in the strings. This spills over into the *coda*, marked *vivace*, which opens with music actually derived from the first movement *cadenza*, the piano in its lowest register, joined by timpani and lower strings, creating an atmosphere of menace and irresistible momentum. The music gallops forward, with a brief pause for a short *cadenza* before reaching the emotional peak of the work: A grand, sweeping melody derived from the secondary theme now forming a majestic apotheosis. A brief, exultant final sprint brings the concerto to a triumphant close.

Suite from the Firebird (1919) IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

Many of the very greatest composers have revealed their genius at an early age; Igor Stravinsky was not among that number. Growing up surrounded by music and learning, the son of a celebrated singer at the Maryinsky Opera in Saint Petersburg, Stravinsky received a thorough musical training as a boy, but only began to show a serious interest in composition around the age of twenty. Friendship with the youngest son of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov led to a meeting with the composer, who became an unofficial tutor and advisor, even something of a father figure to the young man. In his early twenties Stravinsky composed a series of bland and well-crafted works which showed little sign of his eventual gifts, among them a piano sonata and a *Symphony in E-flat*, which reflected the influence of Tchaikovsky and Borodin. But in his mid-twenties he began to undergo a remarkable transformation. Not long before Rimsky's death in 1908 Stravinsky showed him sketches for a projected opera, *The Nightingale*, and the *Scherzo Fantastique*, perhaps the most important of the early compositions. Soon after, in early 1909, the *Scherzo* was heard at its premiere by the man who would become the key figure in Stravinsky's career, Sergei Diaghilev. In that same year Diaghilev launched the first of what would become his annual "Russian seasons" in Paris, presenting classical ballet productions, as well as an ambitious repertoire of Russian operas, all of which were utterly unknown in the West. The operas dazzled the Parisian audiences with their colorful Oriental exoticism, but lost money. While the initial ballet evenings astonished the public with the superior gifts of Russian dancers, in style and subject matter they remained close to the familiar styles of French classical ballet. Diaghilev realized that he needed to develop a repertory of distinctively Russian ballet, bringing together virtuoso dance and the sort of vivid textures and rhythms of Russian music that made such a powerful impression in the opera performances. Determined to produce a distinctive Russian ballet for his 1910 season in Paris, Diaghilev proposed a new ballet based on Russian folk tales, the *Firebird*, which would be a feast for eye and ear, a spectacle unlike any other ever seen in Paris. The music was originally to have been composed by Diaghilev's staff conductor, Nikolai Tcherepnin, who quickly withdrew from the project. Then, after a period of squabbling, no fewer than three other composers were offered the commission, and all refused. One of the familiar myths about the origins of the *Firebird* has it that Anatol Liadov, a respected composer of the older generation, was offered the commission, but as usual worked in a lackadaisical manner. The truth is that only after four or five composers shunned the commission was Stravinsky selected for the job, proceeding to compose the 45-minute score in little more than four months, in time for the hugely successful premiere in Paris on June 24, 1910. As was said of Lord Byron, Stravinsky "awoke to find himself famous." A year later *Petrushka* appeared, and in 1912 *Le Sacre du Printemps* was composed, although not performed until 1913. Thus, turning away from Tchaikovsky's classicism (much as Stravinsky himself revered that musical

idiom), genuine "Russian" ballet came into being with *The Firebird* drawing upon unique Russian musical traditions, and in the process establishing the international supremacy of Russian dance.

The introduction to the ballet opens the 1919 suite, a somber evocation of the world of the evil King Kashchei, with a brooding, darkly chromatic figure in the lower strings, winding around the intervals of the third (major and minor) and tritone, joined by scarcely audible trombone, sustaining a figure of interlocking thirds. Lower winds and muted trumpets add menacing points of color and rhythmic contrast, soon sinking onto a sustained D major, where, in the words of the composer, is set off "the natural-harmonic *glissando* like a 'Catherine-wheel'." The chromatic theme recurs, now in flutes and oboes, then in the strings, with a muted horn-call leading the way to the second section, the *Dance of the Firebird* and *Variation of the Firebird*. The full range of Stravinsky's astonishing command of orchestral color bursts forth with a series of trills, then an explosion of musical "fireworks" (not for nothing had the composer already composed a work of that very name!). Glittering layers of uniquely Russian instrumental sonority are set out with precise rhythmic clarity, filling the air with fluttering, twittering, swooping filigree patterns, all the while moving forward over subtly syncopated patterns in the lower instruments. The traditional vocabulary of musical analysis cannot begin to describe such extraordinarily original music. That said, an attentive listener might detect elements drawn from the great 19th century tradition of Russian music, from Glinka through Borodin, and especially Stravinsky's own mentor, Rimsky-Korsakov. There is also a hint of the influence of Debussy; the opening chromatic figure betrays a debt to *L'Après-midi d'un faune* and *Nuages*. The matter of possible influences upon the young Stravinsky was always a sensitive issue with the composer, who usually disavowed any indebtedness to others. The "interlocking thirds" in the *Introduction* are clearly inherited from Rimsky, as well as the intermittent use of the so-called "octotonic" [eight-note] scale, which the older composer had made much use of in his later operas. (That 8-note scale turns out to be identical to one used by Olivier Messiaen in his *Trois Petites Liturgies*, performed by the PSO last Spring.) In a flurry of scale figures, circling *arpeggios*, trills and *glissandi*, the movement ends, the Firebird flying away out of sight.

The second movement, bearing the French title, *Ronde des princesses* ("Khorovod" in Russian, or "Round Dance"), borrowed its main theme, heard in the oboe, from an 1877 anthology of Russian folksongs published by Rimsky-Korsakov. It bore a text that began "Around the garden/around the vineyard green/a fine youth went walking..." Quite fittingly this melody is heard at the point in the ballet when the young Prince Ivan makes his appearance in the magic garden of the evil Kashchei. In contrast to the blur of color and rhythmic energy heard in the previous movement, this is music of plaintive, pensive simplicity, very much suggesting the reflective moments found in much earlier Russian music, as in the quiet moments in *Boris Gudonov*, for example. Extended with subtle gradation of orchestral color,

Program Notes

Laurence Taylor

always direct in expression, the music swells into a moment of Romantic richness, then fading away with nostalgic figuration in the winds.

If the second movement reminds us that the *Firebird* might well be regarded as the last great “Romantic Russian composition,” the third movement, the *Infernal Dance of King Kashchei* seems to fling wide the gates into a new musical age. With great *fortissimo* thunderclaps in full orchestra, and a constant thrumming in the basses and timpani, the movement surges forward in a headlong triple meter, packed with explosive syncopated figures, rattling volleys in the brass, the strings asked to play in a percussive manner, joined by piano, harp and percussion. A pleading, folk-like melody in the violins shifts the music into duple meter, providing a moment’s relief from the hammering energy. But the hubbub returns, with more insistent rat-a-tat figures in the brass, the meter returning to a thumping triple beat. Presently the tempo accelerates, becoming ever more frenzied as the orchestra, at a pitch of excitement unique to this work, storms on to a shattering, preemptory final leap.

What would have been a ringing silence is instead an unexpected link in the winds, *pianissimo*, ushering in the tenderly lyrical *Berceuse* (“Lullaby”). The haunting melody unfolded in the bassoon is yet another moment in the ballet attributed to folk music origins.

A shimmering *tremolando* in the strings opens the *Finale*, with a calm, noble tune in the horn, one that again appears to have been borrowed from Rimsky’s folksong anthology, bearing the title *By the Gate a Pine Tree was Swaying To and Fro*. Repeated six times, always with ever-varying orchestral coloration and increasing harmonic richness, the music reaches a towering climax, and in a sudden hush and quickening of tempo, the smooth contours of the original folk melody now are compressed into a sharply defined fanfare-like figure in 7/4 meter. Declaimed by the brass against a background of trills and *tremolandi*, this becomes a peroration thundered out by the full orchestra FFF (marked *maestoso*), reaching a FFFF unison B, the brass in a memorable final fanfare bringing the work to a majestic close.

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