



The Curtis Symphony Orchestra

THE JACK WOLGIN
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

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Monday, October 20, 2008

Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center

Peter Oundjian, *conductor*

Teng Li, *viola*

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Capriccio espagnol

Alborada

Variazioni

Alborada

Scena e canto gitano

Fandango asturiano

WALTON

Viola Concerto

Andante comodo

Vivo, e molto preciso

Allegro moderato

INTERMISSION

MUSORGSKY (arr. RAVEL)

Pictures from an Exhibition

Promenade

Gnomus; Promenade

The Old Castle; Promenade

Tuileries

Bydlo; Promenade

Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle

Limoges

Catacombs; Cum mortuis in lingua mortua

The Hut on Fowl's Legs

The Great Gate of Kiev

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PROGRAM NOTES

Capriccio espagnol, Op. 34

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Born: Tikhvin, Novgorod, Russia,
March 18, 1844

Died: Lyubensk (near St. Petersburg), Russia,
June 21, 1908

The romance of Spain exerted a special attraction for composers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Works such as Debussy's *Ibéria*, Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, Bizet's *Carmen*, and Ravel's *Alborada del gracioso*, *Bolero*, and *Rapsodie espagnole* responded to a growing demand for a sort of Iberian exoticism—not just in France but throughout Europe and Russia as well.

Rimsky-Korsakov originally conceived his “Spanish caprice” as a companion-

piece to the *Fantasia on Two Russian Themes* for violin and orchestra. But during its composition it gradually morphed from a solo violin fantasy into an orchestral showpiece.

He finished it in the summer of 1887, just as he was completing the opera *Prince Igor*. “We rented a villa on the bank of Lake Nyelay, at the Nikolskoye Estate,” he wrote in his memoirs. “Throughout the summer I worked assiduously on the orchestration of *Igor*. ... In mid-summer this work was interrupted: I composed the *Capriccio espagnol* from the sketches of my projected virtuoso violin fantasy on Spanish themes. According to my plans the *Capriccio* was to glitter with dazzling orchestral color and, manifestly, I was correct.”

Elements of the original conception remain in the finished *Capriccio*: Like the composer's *Scheherazade*, it contains a prominent part for violin solo. The piece was rehearsed and performed in December 1887, and it was an immediate success.

'A brilliant composition'

Rimsky-Korsakov responded gruffly to the suggestion by some that it was a piece of fluff. "The opinion formed by both critics and the public that the *Capriccio* is a *magnificently orchestrated piece* is wrong. The *Capriccio* is a *brilliant composition for the orchestra*. The change of timbres, the felicitous choice of melodic designs and figuration patterns exactly suiting each kind of instrument, the brief virtuoso cadenzas for instrumental solo, and the rhythm of the percussion instruments all constitute the very *essence* of the composition and not its garb or orchestration."

It is cast in five sections played without pause. The Alborada is a vigorous morning-serenade, ending with a brief violin solo and followed by a theme and five Variations. A return to the Alborada gives way to the Scene and Gypsy Song, with five orchestral cadenzas. The closing Asturian Fandango, named for a region of northwestern Spain, is bright and dazzling.

Viola Concerto

William Walton

Born: Oldham, England, March 29, 1902

Died: Ischia, Italy, March 8, 1983

Though a favorite of composers as diverse as Mozart and Richard Strauss, the viola has too often found itself shunned as a solo instrument for concertos—and not just because of the low profile that the instrument kept for much of its history. The viola's tessitura and color have

sometimes seemed at odds with the traditionally heroic role of a concerto soloist; and a composer must have consummate skills in orchestration to achieve an accompaniment that doesn't drown out the soloist.

During the twentieth century, however, the viola's musical landscape changed dramatically, and in the twenty-first it continues to do so. Prominent composers have again taken up the challenges of this marvelous instrument's warm, burnished tone, turning it once again into a more seriously solo "voice." We now have a large body of fine works by Hindemith, Bartók, Walton, Druckman, Berio, Feldman, Martin, Martinů, Penderecki, Rihm, Schnittke, and Takemitsu.

Walton's is one of the most commonly performed concertos. A violist himself, he possessed a strong command of the instrument's strengths and weaknesses. He also lavished great care on his relatively small output of works, and he is known today through a surprisingly small subset of this oeuvre: the Piano Quartet, the chamber work *Façade* (1923), the *Sinfonia concertante* for piano and orchestra (1927), the choral masterpiece *Belshazzar's Feast* (1931), and several film scores including music for the 1941 *Major Barbara* and for the classic Laurence Olivier versions of *Richard III*, *Henry V*, and *Hamlet*.

Walton completed the first version of the concerto during the years he lived intermittently with the wealthy Sitwell family, whom he had known during his years at Oxford University and who welcomed him into their home for lengthy periods. He used the Sitwell estate as a place of tranquil retreat, and it was at this quiet refuge that he worked out his distinctively individual musical voice during the 1920s.

For a virtuoso

On the urging of conductor Thomas Beecham, Walton set to work in late 1928. "I have been working hard at a Viola Concerto suggested by Beecham and designed for Lionel Tertis," he wrote to a friend on December 5. "It may be finished by Christmas and is I think by far my best effort up to now." He completed the concerto in February 1929.

Dubbed by a recent author "the first great virtuoso of the viola," the British violist Tertis was known to favor larger violas for their richer tone. A modernist he was not, though, and when Walton sent him the manuscript he mailed it back promptly, declaring it too contemporary. Walton was stung by the reaction, and considered turning it into a violin concerto, but the BBC sent it to composer/violist Paul Hindemith, who liked it and became the soloist in the London premiere, conducted by the composer on October 3, 1929.

Walton was never satisfied with the 1929 version, and in the early 1960s subjected it to a revision, reducing the wind complement and creating a prominent harp part. The new version, performed by violist John Coulling in January 1962, has become the standard.

As in Walton's later concertos for violin and cello, the Viola Concerto begins with a slow movement, continues with a central scherzo movement, and concludes with a densely structured finale. At the outset the two primary themes are presented by the soloist before being taken up and worked out by the orchestra in turn. The scherzo is a vivacious storm of activity with unmistakable tinges of jazz—in which Walton had immersed himself starting around 1923. The protracted finale begins in an upbeat mood but quickly grows more serious. The final surprise is a striking

return of the first movement's main theme, repeated almost verbatim.

Pictures from an Exhibition (Orchestrated by Maurice Ravel) Modest Musorgsky

Born: Karevo, Russia, March 21, 1839

Died: St. Petersburg, Russia, March 28, 1881

Musorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition* presents the musical purist with a conundrum. Pianists long enamored of the original (and highly idiomatic) piano version are sometimes heard to argue for its preeminence to the exclusion of all else. Sviatoslav Richter reclaimed its validity during the 1950s, and pianists like Vladimir Feltsman, Mikhail Pletnev, and Evgeny Kissin continue to make a strong case for it. Yet the world would be much poorer without the several orchestrations that Musorgsky's masterpiece inspired, most notably Ravel's richly hued version of 1922.

Musorgsky's piece was born in a fit of elation over the measured success of his great opera *Boris Godunov*, finally performed at the Mariinsky Theater in February 1874 after four years of rejections. This rare moment of public and official approval inspired a burst of creativity, the fruits of which were the two peerless song cycles *Sunless* and *Songs and Dances of Death* and, finally, *Pictures*.

The latter was inspired by an exhibition the composer attended that spring of some four hundred watercolors, sketches, and costume designs by his friend Viktor Hartmann, an artist and architect who had died the year before, aged thirty-nine. Though art historians have proclaimed some of the images of dubious artistic merit, they clearly sparked something profound in the composer, who wrote his piano suite

during three weeks of furious activity in June 1874.

“Hartmann is boiling as *Boris* boiled,” Musorgsky wrote to his friend and colleague Vladimir Stasov, to whom the *Pictures* are dedicated. “Sounds and ideas have been hanging in the air; I am devouring them and stuffing myself. I barely have time to scribble them onto paper.” He composed ten pieces, dating the work’s completion June 22, 1874. Ravel’s 1922 orchestration, produced on commission from conductor Serge Koussevitzky in Paris, has become the most-performed version, despite having been criticized by some as being more Ravel than Musorgsky.

A gallery stroll

Each piece in *Pictures* portrays one of Hartmann’s images. A series of “intermezzos,” as Musorgsky himself suggests above, is interspersed among the pictures to represent the viewers walking about the exhibit. The composition, in fact, begins with the stately “Promenade” theme, which reappears three more times throughout the piece. “Gnomus” presents a nutcracker resembling a wizened old gnome. “The Old Castle” is a watercolor of an ancient palace in front of which a troubadour sings a ballad, the latter

represented by a memorable alto saxophone solo.

“Tuileries” is a scherzo-like movement that illustrates children playing in a well-known Parisian park. A Polish wagon and oxen are shown in “Bydlo,” and a dance of eggs with legs is the subject of the “Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells.” The satiric “Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle” is followed by another scherzo, “Limoges: The Market,” representing the chatter and quarreling of the shoppers. “The Catacombs” is a picture of a figure with a lantern (said to be Hartmann himself) exploring the tunnels under Paris. To the Latin subscript “Speaking to the Dead in a Dead Language,” Musorgsky has added the following comment to the manuscript score: “Hartmann’s creative spirit leads me to the place of skulls, and calls to them—the skulls begin to glow faintly from within.”

“The Hut on Fowl’s Legs” is the home of Baba Yaga, the Russian witch who lived in a house held up by chicken legs; Hartmann’s depiction is of a clock in the shape of Baba Yaga. “The Great Gate at Kiev,” Hartmann’s architectural sketch for a massive new set of gates at the city’s entrance, inspired Musorgsky’s noisy, virtuosic finale.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Peter Oundjian, conductor

A dynamic presence in the orchestral world, Peter Oundjian continues to make his mark as one of today’s most exciting faces on the conducting scene. In his fifth year as music director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, he draws capacity audiences as he explores the breadth and depth of orchestral repertoire and creates

compelling seasons featuring world-renowned soloists and guest conductors. At the beginning of his tenure, Mr. Oundjian created the now-annual Mozart Festival and the New Creations Festival. His probing musicality, collaborative spirit, and engaging personality have earned him accolades from musicians and critics alike.

In addition to his post in Toronto, Mr. Oundjian serves as principal guest conductor and artistic advisor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, helping to create and launch an innovative multidisciplinary festival in June 2007. For over a decade he has played a major role at the Caramoor International Music Festival in New York, where he currently serves as artistic advisor and principal conductor. From 1998 to 2003, Mr. Oundjian was the music director of the Nieuw Sinfonietta in Amsterdam.

Mr. Oundjian's 2008–09 season features return visits to the Baltimore, Dallas, San Francisco, St. Louis, Houston, and Colorado symphonies, and the Aspen Festival. He will conduct two weeks with the Zürich Tonhalle and begin an annual relationship with the Radio Philharmonique in Paris. Mr. Oundjian also will return to lead the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood.

Born in Toronto, Peter Oundjian was educated in England, where he studied the violin with Manoug Parikian. He attended the Royal College of Music in London and completed his violin training at the Juilliard School in New York, where he studied with Ivan Galamian, Itzhak Perlman, and Dorothy DeLay. He was the first violin of the renowned Tokyo String Quartet, a position he held for fourteen years. Mr. Oundjian is now in his twenty-seventh year as a visiting professor at the Yale School of Music.

Teng Li, *viola*

Teng Li is principal viola of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, a position she has held since 2004. She won first prize at both the Johansson International and the Holland-America Music Society competitions and second prize at the 2003

Primrose International Viola and Irving M. Klein International String competitions. She was also a winner of the Astral Artistic Services 2003 National Auditions.

An accomplished chamber musician, Ms. Li is a member of Chamber Music Society Two of Lincoln Center and has participated in the Marlboro Music Festival, Niagara International Chamber Music Festival, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and Music from Angel Fire.

Ms. Li also performed on the Rising Stars series at Philadelphia's Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts and on Chicago's Dame Myra Hess concert series. She has appeared with the National Chamber Orchestra, Santa Rosa Symphony, and Haddonfield Symphony and was presented in recital for the French Embassy in Beijing. Her performances have been broadcast on NPR, WQXR, WHYY, and WFMT.

Ms. Li began playing the violin at age five in her native China, and at age twelve she transferred her attention to the viola. She entered the Central Conservatory in Beijing in 1992 and by age sixteen was accepted to The Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Michael Tree and Joseph de Pasquale. She graduated in 2005.