The Curtis Symphony Orchestra

THE JACK WOLGIN ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

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Monday, April 27, 2009

Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center

Michael Stern, *conductor*

Carter Brey, *cello*

PROKOFIEV

Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*
Suites No. 1 and 2, Op. 64a+b

Montagues and Capulets
Dance of the Antilles Girls
Romeo and Juliet
Masks
The Death of Tybalt
Romeo at the Tomb of Juliet

PROKOFIEV

Sinfonia concertante, Op. 125

Andante
Allegro giusto
Andante con moto—Allegretto—Allegro marcato

INTERMISSION

STRAVINSKY

***Petrushka* (1947)**

The Shrove-Tide Fair
Petrushka's Cell
The Moor's Cell
The Shrove-Tide Fair (Towards Evening)

Photographic and recording equipment may not be used in Verizon Hall.

PROGRAM NOTES

Suites No. 1 and 2 from *Romeo and Juliet*, Op. 64a+b

Sergei Prokofiev

Born: Sontsovka, Ukraine, April 23, 1891
Died: Moscow, March 5, 1953

Prokofiev approached with trepidation the creation of a ballet based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and wisely so. The ubiquitous play had found dozens of musical adaptations, but most were operas in which language was an essential part of the mix. Could a ballet convey this discursive drama using no words at all? The year was 1934, and the composer had only recently decided to return to his native land, ending a fourteen-year exile in the West. The Russian public was again becoming aware of his music, and he had begun to receive Soviet commissions, one of which was from the State Academic Theater (later the Kirov Theater) for what would become his first full-length story ballet. *Romeo and Juliet* was the brainchild of the theater's director, Sergei Radlov, who had staged the first Soviet production of *The Love for Three Oranges* in 1926.

But *Romeo* quickly fell into a miasma of political intrigue. Sergei Kirov, the Communist Party boss in Leningrad, was assassinated in late 1934, and many of those associated with him, including Radlov, were discredited. Under the new party regime of the dreaded Andrei Zhdanov, the theater was forced to cancel Prokofiev's ballet. The project was taken over by the Bolshoi, then canceled again. Prokofiev had completed most of the music by 1935, but the ballet would not appear on the Russian stage until 1940, when the Kirov Theater finally took it up again. By this time, it had already received a performance in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1938.

Radlov remained on the project, as choreographer, but because he was ill-equipped for the job two more collaborators were brought in to fix up the scenario. The result was a mishmash, like a movie script with too many authors. It was Prokofiev's idea to tack on a happy ending, in which Romeo arrives in time to save Juliet and they live peaceably ever after. "The reason for taking such barbarous liberty with Shakespeare's play

was purely choreographic," the composer wrote. "Live people can dance, but the dying can hardly be expected to dance in bed." Before the work reached completion the choreographers convinced Prokofiev to restore Shakespeare's tragic ending.

Despite the intrigue surrounding the production, the resulting ballet music was a triumph for the composer. The Soviet public, which had heard the two suites from the ballet in concert even before the first staged performance of the full-length work, was enthusiastic about the music. Even the "official" response to the first Soviet production in January 1940 was relatively positive.

Prokofiev compiled suites in 1936, 1937, and 1946, sometimes adapting the orchestration to produce more transparent textures. The selection on today's program draws from the first two. The bold *Montagues and Capulets* is music to accompany the knights' dance at the Capulet ball, and tender *Dance of the Antilles Girls* depicts the bridesmaids' dance around the sleeping Juliet—its upward-arching melody suggesting an echo of the knights' dance. *Romeo and Juliet* accompanies the star-crossed lovers as they separate themselves from the company to dance their nervous *pas de deux*. It is some of the most romantic music composed in the twentieth century, and unusually long for a *pas de deux*. An infectious rhythm drives the mysterious *Masks*, heard when Romeo, Mercutio, and Benvolio show up uninvited at the ball. The *Death of Tybalt* is the noisy, tragic moment in which Romeo duels with Tybalt to avenge Mercutio, triumphing with fifteen fateful chords. Today's suite closes with the climactic *Romeo at Juliet's Tomb*, a dark, poignant funeral march in which the desperate hero slays Paris and then poisons himself.

Sinfonia concertante for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 125

Prokofiev

Few of Prokofiev's instrumental works embody so many facets of the composer's stylistic world as the Sinfonia concertante completed in 1952, which blends the driving edginess of his early works with the more relaxed style of his later Soviet music. Rich in melody, beautifully orchestrated, and sure-footed in its unshowy solo virtuosity, it even gets in a dig at the Soviet apparatchiks, with a sardonic little borrowed tune that nearly got the composer into trouble.

The story of the Sinfonia concertante begins in the early 1930s and ends with its completion during the last years of Prokofiev's life twenty years later. Its initial incarnation was as the Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 58, composed between 1934 and 1938 during a fertile period that saw the completion of some of his most beloved works, notably *Peter and the Wolf*, *Lieutenant Kijé*, the Second Violin Concerto, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Having recently returned to the Soviet Union from the West, Prokofiev was eager to re-ingratiate himself with the authorities with accessible, sometimes high-quality, music. But at its 1938 premiere the Cello Concerto was a failure, partly because the soloist, Lev Berezovsky, was reportedly ill-prepared to confront its edgy aesthetic.

The concerto was put aside for more than a decade, when a twenty-year-old cellist dusted it off for a 1947 performance in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. Prokofiev went backstage to praise the young cellist, whose name was Mstislav Rostropovich, and promised on the spot to revise it for him. According to Harlow Robinson's biography of Prokofiev, the cellist repeatedly reminded the composer of his promise. Meanwhile Prokofiev wrote another piece for him, the Cello Sonata, Op. 119, and Rostropovich gave its public premiere with pianist Sviatoslav Richter in March 1950.

The revision of the concerto would be one of the last things to occupy Prokofiev before his death in 1953. Composer and cellist collaborated on the work from early 1950 to early 1952. The result, not a revision but a new piece using materials from the original, was performed in Moscow in February 1952, with Richter making an unprecedented appearance on the podium. Prokofiev continued tinkering with the piece, which was briefly called Cello Concerto No. 2, and decided that it had undergone such a transformation that it needed a new name. Though his new title has at times been translated as Symphony-Concerto, Robinson has shown that Prokofiev chose the title in order to place his piece in the historical tradition of the nineteenth-century sinfonia concertante, with its emphasis on the interplay of soloist(s) and ensemble.

A most original work

The resulting forty-minute concerto, with expanded orchestration that includes celesta, is one of the composer's most original works—one of the last glimmers of his genius in a period when his output had grown erratic. "After all the bland and oddly lethargic orchestral music he had written since the Sixth Symphony," Robinson writes, "the Sinfonia concertante reaffirms, on the eve of his death, Prokofiev's forceful and unique artistic personality, and demonstrates once again how important it was for him to collaborate with artists as talented as he was."

The concerto is cast in three movements, with a huge central Allegro giusto flanked by an Andante and an Andante con moto. The first begins with great striding chords and an expansive cello theme, which gives way to an eerie second subject. The climax turns martial, in the vein of the composer's wartime works, but the movement draws to a tranquil close.

The second movement begins with riveting perpetual motion, with ominous brass chords and sudden quiet, followed by a return to the lush, Romantic world of *Romeo and Juliet*. A big virtuosic cadenza leads to a passage of ferocious double-stops so difficult that Rostropovich asked the composer to make an alternative, simpler version (not for him, but for less-gifted colleagues); Carter Brey, tonight's soloist, performs the original Rostropovich double-stops. This tour de force picks the tempo back up for a furious return to the energy of the opening.

The imploring cello melody at the outset of the finale takes us back to the mood of the first movement, but here the texture is even more heavily diatonic. The movement is a set of freely composed variations on a theme heard in the solo part and taken up by trumpet, horn, winds and others. The ample solo parts for the orchestral principals give the movement an unusually collaborative feel. Halfway through Prokofiev throws in what many have heard as a sly "last laugh" at the Stalinist establishment: First the solo cello and then a mocking solo bassoon plays an altered version of a popular Soviet tune called "Our Toast" by Vladimir Zakharov, a hated apparatchik, which includes the lyrics "Let's drink to the Motherland! Let's drink to Stalin!"

It was similar enough to the original, Rostropovich later wrote, that at the first

performance at the Union of Composers, Zakharov stood up to complain about the distortion of his tune. "When I related this to Prokofiev," the cellist continued, "he wrote a replacement tune (a waltz, which I never played), and said that once everything had settled down we would quietly revert to the original tune." (That's exactly what happened: In the published score, the replacement waltz appears in an appendix.) It was as if, after a lifetime of walking a delicate line between individuality and obedience to Soviet authority, Prokofiev was willing to risk thumbing his nose one last time.

Petrushka (1947 version)

Igor Stravinsky

Born: Lomonosov, Russia, June 17, 1882
Died: New York City, April 6, 1971

When Sergei Diaghilev visited Igor Stravinsky in Switzerland in the summer of 1910, he expected the composer to have made progress on the score that was to be their next big collaboration, *Le Sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*). To his initial dismay, he found that another piece altogether was underway, one that would make *L'Oiseau de feu* (*The Firebird*) look conventional in comparison. It was *Petrushka*, a piece that, a century later, continues to baffle and delight.

Stravinsky had been putting off the *Rite*, which he feared was going to be a huge project. So he started doodling at the keyboard, with bitonal chords and wild pianistic roulades. (Stravinsky composed at the piano, and often by playing his scores on the keyboard one can discover the tactile origins of some of his most striking sonorities, like the F-sharp/C major "*Petrushka* chord.") Initially he thought of *Petrushka* as an orchestral work with concertante piano, "a sort of *Konzertstück*," as he later wrote. "I had in my mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of *arpeggi*. The orchestra, in turn, retaliates with menacing trumpet-blasts ... and it ends in the sorrowful and querulous collapse of the poor puppet." The seeds were planted for *Petrushka*. Fortunately, when he played passages of it for Diaghilev, the impresario enthusiastically suggested that the composer turn the work into a ballet.

With the aid of Alexandre Benois, the scenic designer for the Mariinsky Theater and frequent Ballets Russes collaborator, Diaghilev and Stravinsky worked out a detailed scenario. The action centered on Petrushka, a sort of mischievous loafer of Russian folklore. In Stravinsky's and Benois's rendering, Petrushka is a puppet who comes to life and annoys everyone, including the ballerina with whom he falls desperately in love.

Completing the music in early 1911, Stravinsky gave the work to Michel Fokine, who, though not a fan of the music, created the choreography. Vaslav Nijinsky danced the title role in the work's premiere in Paris on June 11 of that year; Pierre Monteux conducted the performance, which took place at the Théâtre du Châtelet. Its revolutionary musical language made a deep impression, and the success came as somewhat of a surprise even to its creators.

"We were all afraid that its position on the program would be ruinous," Stravinsky later said. "Everyone said that it could not succeed at the beginning of a program."

Petrushka was also crucial in Stravinsky's development. "The success was good for me," he said, "in that it gave me the absolute conviction of my ear just as I was about to begin *The Rite of Spring*."

A new orchestration

In 1947 Stravinsky rewrote his score for a smaller orchestra, "with the dual purpose of copyrighting it and of adapting it to the resources of medium-sized orchestras," as he said later. "Ever since the first performance of the score, I had wanted to balance the orchestral sound more clearly in a few places, and to effect other improvements in the instrumentation. The orchestration of the 1947 version is, I think, much more skillful."

Petrushka is divided into four tableaux, or scenes.

The First Tableau depicts the Shrovetide Fair in St. Petersburg in the early nineteenth century and features dances by various groups of villagers and circus performers. A performer produces a small theater containing three puppets. As he plays the flute, the puppets come to life and begin to dance.

The Second Tableau takes place in Petrushka's room or cell, where the boy rails against his awkwardness and his total dependence upon the puppet-master's will. Here the "*Petrushka* chord" makes its appearance, "as Petrushka's insult to the public," in the composer's words.

In the Third Tableau**,** the ballerina visits the third puppet, the Blackamoor, whom she favors over Petrushka. Enter Petrushka, throwing himself about in a jealous fit.

The Fourth Tableau returns to the Shrovetide Fair, with a varied array of dances. In the midst of the commotion, the puppets come to life again. The Moor chases Petrushka, strikes him down, and makes off with the ballerina as Petrushka dies. The puppet-master assures the public that Petrushka is only a doll, and the crowd disperses. But in a final surprise, Petrushka's ghost is seen on the roof, mocking the puppet-master and the audience, as well. Or is it the real Petrushka, truly alive after all?

BIOGRAPHIES

Michael Stern, *conductor*

Conductor Michael Stern is in his fourth season as music director of the Kansas City Symphony, which has been hailed for its remarkable artistic and institutional growth since his tenure began. They have recorded for Naxos and Reference Recordings. The 2008–09 season also marks Mr. Stern's first as principal guest conductor of Orchestre National de Lille, France.

Mr. Stern is founding artistic director and principal conductor of the IRIS Orchestra, recognized for its brilliant playing, its varied programming with special emphasis on American contemporary music, and its recordings on the Naxos and Arabesque labels. IRIS has commissioned works by Stephen Hartke, Richard Danielpour, Edgar Meyer, Jonathan Leshnoff, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, among others.

Mr. Stern has served as chief conductor of Germany's Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra, with whom he made several recordings of American repertoire, and permanent guest conductor of the Orchestre National de Lyon in

France. He has appeared with the national orchestras of Paris, Bordeaux, Lille, and Toulouse, and conducted orchestras throughout Europe and the Far East. Mr. Stern led the Vienna Radio Symphony on a tour of China. He has also been a frequent guest conductor of the Tonhalle Orchestra in Zurich and has recorded both with that orchestra and with the London Philharmonic for Denton Records.

Mr. Stern has conducted the New York Philharmonic; the Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Montreal, Saint Louis, and Toronto symphony orchestras; the Cleveland and Philadelphia orchestras; the Houston and Seattle symphonies; and the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., where he will return in winter 2010. He appears regularly at the Aspen Music Festival and has served on the faculty of the American Academy of Conducting at Aspen.

Mr. Stern graduated from The Curtis Institute of Music, where his major teacher was Max Rudolf. Mr. Stern edited the third edition of Rudolf's textbook, *The Grammar of Conducting*, as well as a new volume of Rudolf's collected writings and correspondence (Pendragon Press). He also studied at the Pierre Monteux Memorial School under the tutelage of Charles Bruck and earned a degree in American history from Harvard University.

Carter Brey, *cello*

Carter Brey was appointed principal cello of the New York Philharmonic in 1996 and made his subscription debut as soloist with the orchestra in 1997, performing Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* led by then-music director Kurt Masur. He has performed as soloist in subsequent seasons in the Elgar Cello Concerto with André Previn conducting; in William Schuman's *Song of Orpheus* with Christian Thielemann; in the Barber Concerto with conductor Alan Gilbert; in Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote* with Music Director Lorin Maazel and with former music director Zubin Mehta; and in the Brahms Double Concerto with concertmaster Glenn Dicterow and conductor Christoph Eschenbach, as well as with Lorin Maazel on the orchestra's 2007 tour of Europe. The Brahms was also performed at the Tanglewood Music Center in the summer of 2002 as part of Mr. Masur's final concerts as Philharmonic music director.

Mr. Brey rose to international attention in 1981 as a prizewinner in the Rostropovich International Cello Competition. Subsequent appearances with Mstislav Rostropovich and the National Symphony Orchestra were unanimously praised. The winner of the Gregor Piatigorsky Memorial Prize, Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Young Concert Artists' Michaels Award, he also was the first musician to win the Arts Council of America's Performing Arts Prize and has performed as soloist with many of America's major symphony orchestras.

Mr. Brey's chamber music career is equally distinguished. He has made regular appearances with the Tokyo and Emerson string quartets, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Spoleto Festival in the United States and Italy, and the Santa Fe and La Jolla chamber music festivals, among others. He presents an ongoing series of duo recitals with pianist Christopher O'Riley; together they have recorded *The Latin American Album*, a disc of compositions from South America and Mexico (Helicon Records). His recording with Garrick Ohlsson of the complete works of Chopin for cello and piano was released by Arabesque in the fall of 2002 to great acclaim.

Mr. Brey studied with Laurence Lesser and Stephen Kates at the Peabody Conservatory of Music and with Aldo Parisot at Yale University. He joined the faculty of The Curtis Institute of Music in 2008.