

Program Notes

Berkshire Symphony Orchestra

Soloists Gala

April 25, 2014

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18

I. Moderato

featuring **Joyce Lee '17, piano**

Sergei Rachmaninoff composed this concerto between the autumn of 1900 and spring of 1901. The complete concerto was premiered, with Rachmaninoff himself as the soloist, in November 1901 and was met with resounding praise. This differed highly from the reaction in 1897 when Rachmaninoff's first symphony was widely and harshly derided and criticized. Being met with harsh criticism, Rachmaninoff fell into a deep depression and a severe compositional crisis – compounded by problems in his personal life - that lasted several years. His story is told in his second piano concerto, a testament to his struggle and battle to recovery. It is dedicated to Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a physician and mentor who did much to restore Rachmaninoff's self-confidence and creativity.

The opening of the movement is very distinct in itself, forgoing the typical orchestral introduction of concertos. Instead, it opens with a piano solo that is a series of bell-like tolls, building up tension that eventually finds its climax with the introduction to its main theme. Here, the orchestra carries the majestic Russian melody, while the piano substantiates and adds to the theme with arpeggios. What is interesting here is that the opening piano solo does not introduce the grand and dignified attitude of the C minor theme. Rather, this role is given to the orchestra, while the piano opens with a more sinister F minor theme. The second subject finds itself in a rhapsodic style in E-flat major. It is a dynamic contrast between a beautiful but tragic sense of unfulfilled desires and a dignified frustration. The rawness of his emotion tensely culminates in a burst of energy, an ending to the first movement of one of Rachmaninoff's best.

- Joyce Lee

Sato Matsui '14 (b. 1992)

Memorabilia

Memorabilia opens with a wistful, sighing theme by the celli and two chromatically ambiguous chords in the woodwinds. As the narrative unfurls, these yearning motives weave through moments of doubt, respite, turbulence, rapture, and ultimately lead to the fulfillment of a long-anticipated resolution.

As early as I can remember, I have always had a habit of attaching memories, meanings, moods, and even personalities to otherwise mundane objects. From the sticks and pebbles of my make-believe games and the pale blue cardigan that recalls one summer afternoon to my favorite worn-down composition pencil, perfectly ordinary things can transform into exquisite symbols that color daily routines. The inspiration behind *Memorabilia* is very much captured in its title; this one-movement orchestral piece is meant neither to represent nor to evoke any

particular idea. Instead, I hope that the music will invite the listener to simply enjoy and partake in the imaginative process, to discover their own memories and moods within the various shades of the musical phrases.

I have dedicated *Memorabilia* to my mentors in the Berkshire Symphony and the Williams College Department of Music, without whose guidance and encouragement this piece would not have come to be. Behind each instrumental part are the hours of patience with which my mentors in the Berkshire Symphony acquainted me with the colorful writing techniques of orchestral instruments. My decisions on timbre, color, and orchestration come from four years of playing my violin in the midst of great student and professional musicians, while I owe my copious attention to articulation, dynamics, timing, and expression to my violin teacher extraordinaire, Joana Genova. My love of both incorporating and reinterpreting traditional Western tonality was deepened tremendously by my music theory and history professors Ed Gollin, Anthony Sheppard, Marjorie Hirsch, and Mary Caldwell, and I am indebted to my teacher Benjamin C. S. Boyle at the European American Musical Alliance in Paris for my invaluable knowledge of harmony and counterpoint. I express the sincerest gratitude to Jenny Dewar and the assistant stage managers for the graceful facilitation of this production, and to Maestro Andrew Massey and Maestro Ronald Feldman for helping me achieve the height of this exciting premiere. Lastly, I hope that the time and thought that I have dedicated to the making of this piece will reflect my gratitude toward my two extraordinary composition teachers Ileana Perez-Velazquez and David Kechley for their years of unfailing care and mentorship.

- Sato Matsui

Georges Enescu (1881 – 1955)

Concertpiece for Viola and Orchestra

featuring **Lysander Jaffe '14, viola**

Georges Enescu (1881-1955) was born in Romania. His work reflects the influence of German romanticism, French impressionism, and Romanian folk music. A child violin prodigy, he entered the Vienna Conservatory at the age of seven. In 1895 he began studying composition at the Paris Conservatoire, where his teachers included Massenet and Faure. In his own lifetime, Enescu was most famous as a virtuoso violinist and pianist, and an acclaimed pedagogue whose students included Yehudi Menuhin. He is now seen as a pioneer in his use of folk music and an important representative of Romania's musical heritage.

Enescu wrote the *Concertpiece for Viola and Piano* in 1906 for a competition he was judging at the Paris Conservatoire. He dedicated it to Theophile Laforge, the Conservatoire's first viola professor. Enescu was a violist himself; this piece reflects his love for the instrument and an unusual awareness of its soloistic potential. It opens with a low, expansive theme that later recurs in new octaves and textures, and follows sonata form. The *Concertpiece* reflects Enescu's mixed musical upbringing. Unpredictable meter, phrase, and accent changes, as well as moments of modal uncertainty, suggest folk influence, while the diminished arpeggios and accompanying arabesques owe more to French impressionism. The piece's frequent character changes stretch the performer's musical imagination and provide ample opportunity for personal expression.

The *Concertpiece* is still popular as a competition piece for viola and piano. Enescu considered orchestrating the piece but never did. Since his death a few different orchestrations have appeared, but the piece is still rarely done as a concerto. It has been an honor to bring this little-

known work to the Williamstown community, and I would like to thank Ahling Neu, Andrew Massey, Ronald Feldman, and all the Berkshire Symphony players for their support.

- Lysander Jaffe

Leonard Bernstein (1918 – 1990)

“Glitter and Be Gay” from *Candide*

featuring **Claire Leyden '16, soprano**

Based on Voltaire’s novella of the same name, Bernstein’s *Candide* is a satirical comedy that follows the young and naïve Candide as he journeys around the world in search of his lost love, Cunegonde. Candide’s biggest challenge is that he must overcome the disillusionment of his youth, and face the reality that his world is not, in fact, “the best of all possible worlds.” Through various adventures, trials, and separations, Candide and Cunegonde learn to grieve and love, and must build their own life for themselves, learning to “make their garden grow.”

The operetta’s first run was a complete flop—it barely lasted two months on Broadway after its opening performance on December 1, 1956. While Bernstein’s music was immediately a success, critics saw Lillian Hellman’s libretto as too heavy for the light satire of Voltaire’s story. After its original performance, the libretto underwent serious rewritings—Richard Wilbur became the project’s primary lyricist, but the libretto holds the work of various other playwrights and poets, including John Latouche, Dorothy Parker, Stephen Sondheim, and Bernstein himself. Since 1974, the operetta has generally been performed with a Tony Award-winning book by Hugh Wheeler, author of the books for Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music* and *Sweeny Todd*.

Cunegonde sings “Glitter and Be Gay” to lament (and delight in) the unsavory occupation she must take up after finding herself lost in Paris. Fallen from her noble birth, she regrets every circumstance of her unfortunate state—excluding, perhaps, her fancy jewelry! Distracted by what glitters in life, she flits across the stage, piling on her jewels and forgetting her former cares. Lost in this fit of excitement, she suddenly becomes overwhelmed and stops, and must remind herself how miserable she is. A classic comedic showpiece, “Glitter and Be Gay” is a favorite of sopranos everywhere. It is an honor and an absolute pleasure to be singing it with the Berkshire Symphony, and I could not be more grateful for this opportunity.

- Claire Leyden

Antonín Dvořák (1841 – 1904)

Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70

Is music just for fun, or is it serious business?

Some composers strike us immediately as serious, and perhaps a touch intimidating. Beethoven comes to mind. Brahms too. Through the ages there have also been composers who only wrote light entertainment, or even trivial rubbish. But there are some whose profundity is masked by appearances. Tchaikovsky is one; a composer of huge sophistication, skill, and complexity, often underestimated because of his disarming melodic immediacy. Dvorak is another such; a composer of delight and charm, who can easily be taken too lightly. Incidentally, Dvorak is unrivaled in his ability to give the musicians themselves a joyous time. He writes for the people of the orchestra, not just for members of the audience, understanding that the

orchestra is a body of individuals, each grateful to have something wonderful to play. The orchestra is itself an audience, and Dvorak gives the musicians special delights that the listening audience may well not be aware of. He is, as it were, a kind and generous composer.

Brahms and Dvorak very much admired each other's music, Brahms being particularly impressed by Dvorak's cello concerto. Dvorak, for his part, was struck by Brahms third symphony, a complex piece bearing the implied, ambiguous motto: "Free, but happy." Dvorak's earlier symphonies had mostly been sunny affairs, but in the seventh, Dvorak took note of the complex, multi-dimensional possibilities of symphonic writing. There are, in fact, technical similarities between the Dvorak 7th and the Brahms 3rd, such as the fact that both begin in medium tempo compound time. It doesn't matter what that means, precisely. I only mention it because it is a factor which, for the musicians, makes the rhythms difficult to control and to judge, thus making the music harder to play than a casual listener might suppose. This, I believe, is a major reason why the 7th of Dvorak and the 3rd of Brahms are, generally speaking, the least often performed of their symphonies. It certainly isn't because of any lack of inspiration, which is at a particularly high level in both works.

For this symphony in particular, therefore, admiring Brahms' accomplishment, Dvorak was looking to the dark side. This conscious agenda doesn't damage the piece, or compromise Dvorak's ability to charm, but it does give it an intensified dimension of gravitas.

The first movement of the Symphony No 7 is weighty in both size and manner, the opening somber, intense and relentless, but leading to a second melody easily flowing, innocent except for a little spasm of heartbreak. This is a full-throated, architecturally sustained large scale sonata design, but, as was so often the case with Beethoven, a startling revelation unfurls only after the formal obligations have been met. Once the necessary components of a symphonic first movement have been assembled - exposition, development, and recapitulation - instead of simply ending, the music takes off in a startling, unshackled coda, suddenly speeding up, accelerating to an unanticipated peak, before collapsing into a quiet, complicated coda, fading away in exhaustion. Clearly, there is more at stake in this symphony than we had perhaps supposed.

Indeed, all the movements of this symphony have a similar combination of grace and charm, combined with darkness more or less contained, never acknowledged as the primary substance, but inescapably there.

The second movement, for instance, begins with a disarmingly simple, song-like melody for woodwinds, followed by a slightly more confident flute melody. But we now find ourselves in a somber canyon. The music is thin, sparsely harmonized, quiet, hard to grasp, like the end of the first movement. Without ever finding an explanation, we climb out, fueled mostly by the energy of anxiety, and find ourselves safely back, greeted by a sunny, relaxed horn melody. But this melody, in turn, is almost derailed by disruptive energy, as indeed is every stage of this movement; a series of innocent beginnings, worried continuations, and calming resolutions. In the end a deal is struck, compromise being found in nostalgia.

The third movement is (mostly) a joy. Were it not for the complexity required of any movement applying for membership in a symphony, this could be one of Dvorak's infectious Slavonic Dances, full of dash and swirl, with a delicious cross-play of three against two, pitting swirling leaps against smooth glides. Dance music all the way. As symphonic etiquette requires, there is a slightly more restful middle section, then it is back into the high energy, carefree dance. But this second time round, the broken heart will not stay hidden. First time around, the dance was

danced twice. This time, after a first prance round the floor, we slip unnoticed out of the ballroom to a private place, unable to escape our sadness and longing. The impetus of the ball is eclipsed, giving way to a wide arcing melody of regret from the violas. Dvorak openly confirmed that he inserted references to an actual lost love into his music. Once his sadness is fully confronted and admitted, Dvorak re-enters the ballroom, just in time for the end of festivities, behaving as if nothing had happened.

Immediately, however, we are plunged into a tense, strained, rather self-conscious finale, beginning with a brave leap that falls back almost to silence, and which is followed by another, and then another. The effort needed to get this finale airborne is immense, and we never forget that despite its eventual energy and reach. Once underway, the journey seems secure, and there are quiet moments as well as exultations. The quiet times are not even sad any more. Tentative and strange, but not sad. As befits a great symphony, the conclusion is grand and assertive, even though, after all we have heard, we know that it is a matter of grim determination rather than exultation.

If I seem to stress the unsettled side of things, it is because the troubled side is easy to miss if we don't listen carefully. As with Tchaikowsky, we can be seduced by the delicious surface of Dvorak's music, and miss a major part of the message. I am thinking also of his most beloved symphony, the symphony "From the New World," which, despite its flawless beauty, is, I humbly submit, relentlessly sinister.

- Andrew Massey
Tuesday, April 8, 2014