

**~Program Notes~**  
**Berkshire Symphony Orchestra**  
**October 17, 2014**

**Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983)**  
**Variaciones Concertantes, op. 23**

These variations have a subjective Argentine character. Instead of using folkloristic material, I try to achieve an Argentine atmosphere through the employment of my own thematic and rhythmic elements. The work begins with an original theme followed by eleven variations, each one reflecting the distinctive character of the instrument featured. All the instruments of the orchestra are treated soloistically. Some variations belong to the decorative, ornamental or elaborative type, others are written in the contemporary manner of metamorphosis, which consists of taking elements of the main theme and evolving from it new material.

-Alberto Ginastera

**Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)**  
**El Sombrero de Tres Picos (The Three-Cornered Hat)**

In the early 1900's, Sergei Diaghilev held all the major composers of Europe in his sights, so it was just a matter of time before he approached Manuel de Falla to write a ballet for the Ballet Russe. The subject Diaghilev had in mind for the piece was *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, suggested to him by G. Martinez Sierra. However, he happily transferred his enthusiasm to Falla's own suggestion of an adaption of *El Sombrero De Tres Picos*, an 1875 novel by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón based on an old folk tale of political power abused for sexual gratification.

Falla had been toying with the idea of adapting the novel for some years, and was keen to set to work. However, the outbreak of war in 1914 meant that it became nigh on impossible to produce the work. So hindered, Falla, with Diaghilev's blessing and Sierra's help, created a pantomime, *El Corregidor y la Molinera* [The Corregidor and the Miller's Wife], which was produced in Madrid in 1917 to great popular success. He later revised *El Corregidor y la Molinera* extensively to produce the definitive work which was unveiled under its final title, *El Sombrero De Tres Picos*, in London in 1919.

If Diaghilev was hoping for a succès de scandale such as he had achieved with Nijinsky's notoriously erotic interpretation of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* or Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, he may have been disappointed by the final ballet. Falla was devoutly catholic and had toned down the plot considerably – in the ballet, the Miller's Wife is much less amenable to extramarital advances than she is in Alarcón's novel. In other respects, however, it attracted just as much controversy as the impresario could have hoped for. Critical reactions were divided between those who saw it as a remarkable example of the Spanish national character expressed in a contemporary manner (the opinion of many critics outside Spain) and those who viewed it as an act of modernist desecration of Spain's folk traditions (the opinion of many critics within Spain). To put these reactions in context, during this period Spain was undergoing something of an existential crisis: the battle between those who espoused strident international modernism and those who supported a more insular approach to Spanish culture was, in the wake of decades of political instability, a fierce one.

Plot Synopsis

For the set and costume designs, Diaghilev secured the services of Pablo Picasso. Through careful coordination between de Falla and Picasso, the set and costume designs for *El Sombrero De Tres Picos* came to be as much a draw as the music. For the drop curtain Picasso produced a painting depicting a party of spectators at a bullfight. To give the audience time to admire Picasso's work, Falla added an introduction. A soprano sings:

"Casadita, casadita, cierra trance la puerta; Que aunque el diablo esté dormido a lo mejor se despierta!"  
[Little house, you must bolt your door; although the Devil sleeps he may wake up!]

The curtain rises on a small village. In the heat of the afternoon the Miller and his wife go about their tasks: drawing water from the well (with a pulley in desperate need of oiling), feeding the chickens, and so on. The Miller is an ugly man, but his Wife is beautiful; indeed, she has the charm to teach the blackbird to whistle the hour of the day, and attracts the attentions of every passing man. She catches the eye of the Corregidor (the mayor and chief magistrate, whose authority is symbolized by his tricorne), who tries to dance with her. She teases him with a tasty bunch of grapes and in his excitement he loses his balance and falls over.

Part two opens with a dance for the Miller's neighbours: it is St. John's Eve, and the villagers are gathering to drink and dance. The Miller's Wife invites her husband to dance the *farruca*, a solemn and intense flamenco dance. As he finishes, fate comes knocking at his door in the form of the police, sent to arrest the Miller on the Corregidor's orders. As they haul the Miller off, leaving his wife alone, a warning is sung:

"Por la noche canta el cuco. Ad virtiendo a los casados que corran bien los cerrojos que el diablo está desvelado!" [The cuckoo sings in the night. It cautions us to bolt the door, for the Devil is awake!]

Having disposed of his opposition, the Corregidor, dressed in all his official finery, struts into the scene hoping to seduce the Miller's Wife. However, luck is not on his side, and he falls into the millstream. The Miller's Wife mocks him and threatens him with her husband's blunderbuss; then, suddenly frightened, runs off. The Corregidor hangs his sodden clothes up to dry, goes upstairs, and falls asleep on the Miller's bed.

Meanwhile, the Miller has escaped his captors. He returns home to find the Corregidor unclothed in his bed and draws the obvious conclusion. Furious, the Miller dons the Corregidor's uniform and sets off to find the Corregidor's wife, who the Miller plans to seduce as true "eye for an eye" old-fashioned vengeance. The Corregidor wakes to find his clothes missing, and puts on the Miller's clothes, the only set of clothes at hand. This inevitably leads to a confusion of identity, as the Corregidor's own officials mistake him for the Miller and arrest him. The confusion is exacerbated by the return of the Miller's Wife, who, distraught to find who she takes to be her husband in the grip of the police, sets upon them, and uproar ensues. The Miller returns, and upon witnessing his wife defending the Corregidor, attacks his rival in a jealous rage. The arrival of a procession of villagers celebrating St John's Eve heralds the final dance, during which the true identities of all are finally revealed, the Miller and his Wife are reconciled, and the Corregidor is tossed about and mocked by the whole village.

-Peter Nagle

## Édouard Lalo (1823-1892)

### Cello Concerto in d minor

Édouard Lalo pursued music as a profession against the wishes of his father, a Napoleonic veteran. Lalo was born and raised in Lille in northernmost France (just across the border from present-day Belgium). There he was allowed to study violin and cello, but, desiring to make music the center of his life rather than a mere hobby, he broke out on his own while still a teenager to forge a career in the musical capital that was Paris. Among his early mentors was François Antoine Habeneck, who played an important role in Parisian musical culture and had the foresight to introduce French audiences to Beethoven's symphonies. Lalo cofounded (he alternately played viola and second violin) the highly regarded Armingaud string quartet and, with the quartet, continued Habeneck's mission by advocating for the Beethoven quartets along with other classics of the Austro-German repertoire.

As a composer, Lalo's career is a testament to the virtue of persistence. He toiled for decades trying to establish his name by writing chamber music, songs, and opera (the standard ticket to success for a French composer of that period). Yet his great breakthrough to public acclaim came late, when he was already in his fifties, and it was in orchestral music: *Symphonie espagnole*, a de facto violin concerto premiered by the celebrity violinist Pablo de Sarasate in 1875. Lalo's gifts as an opera composer had to wait even longer to be acknowledged. It was not until 1888 that Lalo's *Le roi d'Ys* (*The King of Ys*), a major work based on a legend about the mythical city on the coast of Brittany that is swallowed by the sea, finally came to a belated though successful premiere. (Debussy, an admirer of his compatriot's ballet *Namouna*, also turned to this legend for *La cathédrale engloutie* in the first volume of his piano *Préludes*.)

Nowadays the *Symphonie espagnole* tends to overshadow everything else Lalo composed, but his Cello Concerto in D minor—written just a few years after the former, by which time Lalo had enjoyed his first real taste of success—also ranks among his finest achievements. At the time, aside from Schumann's Cello Concerto and the first of Saint-Saëns's two concertos for cello, there were few contemporary concertos for the instrument by major composers. Violinists and pianists had long enjoyed star status as soloists, but the cello was still considered a dubious platform for a solo career. Even Dvorák, whose mature Cello Concerto in B minor (premiered in 1896) would become the cornerstone of the cello's repertoire, harbored doubts about the cello's soloistic possibilities. Lalo composed his Cello Concerto in D minor for Parisian cellist Adolf Fischer (1847-1891). In general, the concerto is remarkable for the assuredness with which Lalo keeps the soloist in the foreground as the protagonist. Likewise, the Spanish flavor suggested by the material's rhythms and textural treatment has been widely observed. With the earlier *Symphonie espagnole*, Lalo, like his contemporary Bizet in the opera *Carmen*, anticipated the vogue for evoking Spanish atmosphere that would attract French composers at the end of the century.

Traces of Lalo's deep understanding of German masters such as Beethoven can also be heard—particularly in the stern rhetorical pose of the slow introduction. After just a few bars of the orchestra's exhortation, the cello enters with its own lyrical musings, not unlike the search for the "joy" theme at the beginning of the finale of Beethoven's Ninth. The cello is then given the honor of declaring the first theme of the *Allegro maestoso*, which ranges widely in its impassioned lyricism and is decorated with cadenza-like flourishes. The movement's structure is easy to follow, playing the declamatory and lyrical elements off each other and featuring limpid orchestration (note especially the flutes), with generous solo spotlights for the cello.

The second movement (alternating between G minor and major) unfolds as a dreamy slow interlude in which fast music is nested. Tchaikovsky uses a similar Scherzo air in the middle of his First Piano Concerto, written shortly before Lalo's cello concerto. The Russian composer was in fact a keen admirer of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, a discovery which proved as fresh as spring water to Tchaikovsky. Indeed, the influence of *Symphonie espagnole* can be seen in Tchaikovsky's own Violin

Concerto. Lalo's Spanish stylings are especially apparent in the dancing mirth of the fast "dream-within-a-dream" passage that occurs twice; in the second appearance, the passage brings the movement to a sprightly close. Lalo prefaces the finale with a slow introduction reminiscent of the piece's opening introduction. Only this time, the introduction is accompanied by an engrossingly eloquent soliloquy for the cello. The soliloquy's Spanish tinge provides a perfect entrée into the Latin accents and fiery rhythms of the ensuing rondo.

*-Thomas May*