



Large Print Concert Programme

Thursday 27 January 2022 7–9pm

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Le tombeau de Couperin (1919)

Maurice Ravel

Maurice Ravel began work on *Le tombeau de Couperin* in the spring of 1914, with a piano transcription of the 'Forlane' from François Couperin's fourth Concert royal, a chamber music suite published in 1722. A 'Forlane' of Ravel's own soon followed, and in September he announced to his friend Roland-Manuel that he was composing a complete 'French suite' for piano. However, his duties as an ambulance driver during World War I meant that he did not finish it until 1917. He dedicated each of the six movements of the piano suite to a friend who had been killed in the war. These friends included Joseph de Marliave, whose wife Marguerite Long gave the work's premiere on 11 April 1919 at the Salle Gaveau in Paris.

Le tombeau de Couperin reveals Ravel's deepening interest in neo-Classicism, a stance by which composers rejected Romantic music's large-scale structures and grand passions in favour of the elegance, balance and restraint they associated with earlier Baroque or Classical works. The piece also shows how anti-German feelings during the war compelled French composers to explore their own cultural heritage. Ravel said his title was a tribute to 18th-century French music in its entirety, rather than Couperin in particular.

The success of the piano suite's premiere encouraged Ravel to turn four of its six movements (omitting the original Fugue and Toccata) into an orchestral suite. Compared to his opulent

pre-war orchestral works the scoring is light: harp, cor anglais and piccolo feature, but trombones, tuba and percussion do not. The orchestral premiere on 28 February 1920, with conductor Rhené-Baton and the Padeloup Orchestra, was even more successful than the piano one, and led Roland-Manuel to declare 'the transcription outdid the charm of the original'.

The woodwind-dominated 'Prelude' pays homage to French-Baroque keyboard music through its *moto perpetuo* (literally perpetual motion, a continuous stream of) triplets, and flourishing ornaments (musical embellishments). The movement builds to a rich climax, before dying away in the witty concluding bars. The 'Forlane' is characterised by skipping dotted rhythms, staccato (detached) phrases, and a pensive, chromatically-tinged refrain. Throughout, Ravel makes expressive use of a wide range of contrasting instrumental tones.

The outer sections of the 'Menuet' feature a lyrical oboe solo, and modal harmonies (based on antique scales) not dissimilar to those in contemporaneous works by Ravel's pupil and friend Ralph Vaughan Williams. The sombre central section is a *musette* (a folk dance characterised by a drone bass). The piece ends with a lively 'Rigaudon', based on a dance that originated in Provence and the Languedoc. The exuberant outer sections – the first time the brass instruments play a prominent role – contrast with a gentler central episode, where woodwind solos with *pizzicato* (plucked) string accompaniment give the air of a playful serenade.

Maurice Ravel

1875 to 1937 (France)

Although born in a rural Basque village, Maurice Ravel was raised in Paris and was accepted as a preparatory piano student at the Conservatoire in 1889. When a full-time student, Ravel was introduced (in 1893) to Emmanuel Chabrier, who he regarded as 'the most profoundly personal, the most French of our composers'. Around this time Ravel also met and was influenced by Erik Satie.

During World War I, he enlisted with the motor transport corps. He was invalided out in late-1916 shortly before the death of his mother, and returned to composition slowly from 1917, completing the piano suite *Le tombeau de Couperin* and the ballet *La valse* (for Diaghilev), and beginning work on his second opera, *L'enfant et les sortilèges*.

Ravel's emotional expression is most powerful in his imaginative interpretations of the unaffected worlds of childhood and animals, and of exotic tales. Spain also influenced the composer's creative personality through his mother's Basque inheritance, together with his liking for the formal elegance of 18th-century French art and music.

Violin Concerto No 5 in A major K219 (1775)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

- 1 Allegro aperto
- 2 Adagio
- 3 Rondeau: Tempo di Menuetto

Completed on 20 December 1775 – only two months after the Fourth – the Fifth Violin Concerto is a piece that, while technically demanding, combines radiant warmth with sprightly humour, and violinistic athleticism with sublime poetry. Conceived on a notably larger scale than his earlier concertos, it has the look of a new stage of development for the composer.

This is a concerto not to be hurried, as is soon established. The opening is surprisingly unassertive, with the orchestral violins striding out lightly over a quivering accompaniment. The soloist emerges with six bars of pensive soaring over a murmuring accompaniment, eventually bursting out into a new theme full of swaggering self-confidence and revealing the opening to have been an accompaniment in search of a tune. Note, too, how the little upward sweep that ends the first orchestral section is taken up for development later in the movement. Interestingly the tempo marking, the speed or pulse of the music, is one that Mozart seems to have been almost the only composer to use: aperto can be translated from Italian variously as ‘open’, ‘bold’, ‘clear’ or ‘frank’.

The slow movement contains an effortless touching melody for the solo violin, with the orchestra supplying the most loving of accompaniments. The concerto finishes with a 'Rondeau' in which returns of the opening theme are interspersed with contrasting episodes.

As in the finales of his Third and Fourth Violin Concertos, Mozart takes the opportunity to introduce an element of humorous impersonation. In the earlier works this took the form of bagpipe-and-drone effects. Here it is an exhilarating excursion into what is usually called 'Turkish' music. In fact this style – evoked through exaggerated melodic leaps, pounding rhythms and *col legno* effects (hitting the strings with the wood of the bow) in the cellos and basses – owes more to Hungarian gypsy music, but for most Europeans of Mozart's time its exoticism would have seemed Turkish enough. Mozart himself borrowed some of this section from music he had already written for a ballet entitled *Le gelosie del seraglio* (The Jealousies of the Harem); the reason behind this particular musical joke, however, remains a mystery.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

1756 to 1791 (Austria)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was one of the most extraordinary child-prodigy musicians in history. He was born in Salzburg, son of the violinist and teacher Leopold Mozart. Wolfgang's sister, Anna Maria ('Nannerl'), was reputedly as talented as he was. The proud Leopold toured both of them around the royal courts of Europe to display their skills.

Mozart's early adulthood was stamped by trauma when he travelled to Paris with his mother in 1778 in an attempt to establish a career there: the sojourn ended in tragedy when she died. His move to Vienna in 1781 was an act of rebellion against his father's insistence that he should stay home and provide income for the family. Instead, Mozart married Constanze Weber, and soon gained a foothold in the imperial capital, with some initial support from Emperor Joseph II.

The Austro-Turkish War, however, heralded a period of reduced prosperity in which the aristocracy was less able to support artistic work. Mozart's debts accumulated, his health began to fail and when a mysterious visitor (now known to be Count Franz von Walsegg) commissioned a Requiem from him, Mozart, according to Constanze, became convinced he was writing his own requiem. He died on 5 December 1791, aged 35.

Symphony No 5 in E minor Op 64 (1888)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

- 1 Andante – Allegro con anima
- 2 Andantino cantabile, con alcuna licenza
- 3 Valse: Allegro moderato
- 4 Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

The Fifth Symphony has everything that Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's music is valued for: clarity of ideas, a sensuous feeling for colour and a powerful directness of effect. The melancholy and nostalgia that is so much a part of Tchaikovsky's character is set within a firm Classical structure that balances inward doubt against outward strength.

The overall mood of each of Tchaikovsky's symphonies is established immediately at the beginning. Here the low clarinet and strings present a motto theme that recurs throughout the symphony. Among Tchaikovsky's sketches there is a scribbled note that gives some idea of what was in his mind:

'Introduction. Complete submission before Fate – or (what is the same thing) the inscrutable design of Providence. Allegro: 1 Murmurs, doubts, laments ... 2 Shall I cast myself into the embrace of faith?'. The music tells us that Tchaikovsky's idea of fate is not a grim power, but something less hostile, holding the possibility also of happiness.

The central movements both relate to the varying moods of the first. The horn theme of the slow movement, after the sombre slow introductory string chords, is obviously a love song, and highlights Tchaikovsky's outstanding sense of orchestral colour.

The appearances of the motto theme heard in the first movement are ominous, perhaps an expression of the composer's own thwarted search for love. The third movement is a waltz, subtly referring back to a passage in the first movement and reminding us that Tchaikovsky's next major work would be his ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, with its inexhaustible wealth of dance movements.

The first three movements all open quietly; the waltz is the first to end loudly, after a subdued appearance of the motto theme. This theme, now firm and confident, provides the long introduction to the finale. The main body of the movement is a vigorous, at times hectic, Russian dance full of rough high spirits. The motto theme is eventually absorbed into its course, and becomes exultant – or rather, shows a desire to be exultant, which is not quite the same thing, for there is something fragile even in Tchaikovsky's most positive statements.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840 to 1893 (Russia)

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk in the Vyatka province of Russia on 7 May 1840, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was the son of a mining engineer. His mother was of French extraction. In 1848 the family moved to the imperial capital, St Petersburg, where he was enrolled at the School of Jurisprudence. He overcame his grief at his mother's death in 1854 by composing and performing, and music remained a diversion from his job – as a clerk at the Ministry of Justice – until he enrolled as a full-time student at the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1863. His First Symphony was warmly received at its St Petersburg premiere in 1868.

Between 1869 and the year of his death Tchaikovsky composed over 100 songs, cast mainly in the impassioned Romance style and textually preoccupied with the frustration and despair associated with love, conditions that characterised his personal relationships.

Tchaikovsky claimed that his Sixth Symphony represented his best work, but the mood of crushing despair heard in all but the work's third movement reflected the composer's state of mind. He died nine days after its premiere on 6 November 1893.

Nathalie Stutzmann

conductor

Nathalie Stutzmann has just been announced as Atlanta Symphony's Music Director from the start of the 2022/23 season. This makes her the second woman in history – after Marin Alsop – to lead a major American orchestra. In addition, this season she begins her position as the Philadelphia Orchestra's new Principal Guest Conductor. Her three-year tenure will involve a regular presence in the orchestra's subscription series in Philadelphia and at its summer festivals in Vail and Saratoga. Nathalie is also entering the fourth season of a highly successful tenure as Chief Conductor of the Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra, which has just been extended by a further two seasons to the end of 2022/23.

Alina Ibragimova

violin

Alina Ibragimova performs music ranging from Baroque works to new commissions, on both period and modern instruments. Highlights of her 2021/22 season include returns to the London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and a debut with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. She also appears at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, Vienna Konzerthaus and London's Wigmore Hall.

Born in Russia in 1985, Alina studied at the Moscow Gnesin School, then moved to the US where she attended the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Royal College of Music. Her teachers have including Natasha Boyarsky, Gordan Nikolitch and Christian Tetzlaff.

Alina performs on an Anselmo Bellosio violin (c 1775), kindly provided by Georg von Opel.

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