

Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
November 11-12-13, 2016
91st Season / Subscription Concert No.3
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We open this concert with a colorful, but rarely-heard early work by Debussy, the orchestral suite *Printemps*. We then welcome back Madison's own Christina and Michelle Naughton. The Naughtons—twin sisters—were both soloists multiple times in our youth concerts when they were growing up in Madison, and they have been working as a piano duo since 2010. They performed as a duo with the Madison Symphony Orchestra in 2012, performing Poulenc's *Concerto for Two Pianos*. At these concerts, the sisters play a work originally written for a brother-sister duo, Mozart's witty *Concerto for Two Pianos*—written for himself and his sister. Shostakovich's *Symphony No.5*, a powerful work that transcended the repression of Stalinist Russia.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Printemps

Debussy composed Printemps (Spring) in Rome, in the winter of 1886-87. An early orchestral version of the score was destroyed in a fire. It was orchestrated in 1912 by Henri Büsser, under Debussy's supervision. This version was premiered in Paris on April 18, 1913. Duration 15:00.

Born into a middle-class family in the town of St Germain-en-Laye—now one of the western suburbs of Paris—Debussy did not begin any formal musical training until age eight, when he began taking piano lessons. However, by the time he was ten, he was able to enroll at the Paris Conservatoire—first as a pianist, but by the time he was in his mid-teens, he was concentrating on composition. His association with the Conservatoire lasted until 1884, when he won the Prix de Rome. Between 1803 and 1968, the French government's Académie des Beaux-Arts awarded a this prize, recognizing excellence in musical knowledge and composition—the “seal of approval” from the French musical establishment that was conferred on many of the finest French composers of the 19th and 20th centuries: Berlioz, Gounod, Bizet, Massenet, Ibert, and many others. The award came with a scholarship to study in Rome for three years, living in the palatial Villa Medici, and Debussy left for Rome in 1885. It was not a good fit. Debussy had already butted heads with the conservatives in the Conservatoire and Académie, and felt stifled by the stuffy atmosphere in Rome, keeping himself apart from the other young artists living at the Villa. (One associate remembered that he spent most of his time alone in his

room, playing through the score of Wagner's *Tristan*.) He was obliged to send home periodic work-samples (*envois*) to show that he was making good use of his time. His first *envoi* from Rome was the "symphonic ode" *Zuleima*—now lost—which the committee criticized severely. The second was the symphonic suite *Printemps*. In February of 1887 as he was finishing a piano score, he wrote to a friend:

"I've decided to write a work of special color, recreating as many sensations as possible. I'm calling it *Printemps*, not 'spring' from the descriptive point of view but from that of living things. I wanted to express the slow laborious birth of beings and things in nature, then the mounting florescence, and finally a burst of joy at being reborn to a new life, as it were. There's no detailed program, of course, as I have nothing but contempt for music organized according to one of those leaflets they're so careful to provide you with as you come into the concert hall. I'm sure you see how powerful and evocative the music needs to be, and I'm not sure that I shall be only successful in this."

Shortly after he finished the score, he left Rome for Paris. This broke the terms of the Prix de Rome, and also marked Debussy's final break with the French musical establishment. Not surprisingly, the committee rejected *Printemps* as well. Debussy put the score away for a quarter of a century, though he did revise the original piano score into a version for piano, four hands in 1904. In 1912 he finally returned to *Printemps*, working with his friend and collaborator Henri Büsser, who orchestrated the version heard here.

Printemps is in two movements. The first (*Très modéré*) is all dreamy Impressionist color, sounding, in Büsser's orchestration, very much like a younger sibling to Debussy's much more famous *Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun"* (1892), with the same transparent scoring that allows individual woodwind and string lines to emerge from the texture. The second movement (*Modéré*) begins in a kind of pastoral atmosphere, sprinkled with horn-calls, but moves to more vigorous music: a series of variations on a lively dance tune introduced by the strings. There is a joyful and brassy coda to end the piece.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Concerto in E-flat Major for Two Pianos and Orchestra, K. 365

Mozart composed this concerto in Salzburg in 1779. The date of the first performance is unknown, but composer was probably soloist with his sister, Maria Anna Mozart. This is our first performance of the work. Duration 24:00.

Mozart's solo-piano concertos—particularly the 17 great concertos written after he moved to Vienna in 1781—are among the landmarks of late 18th-century music, and are frequently played today. The delightful two-piano concerto heard here is less well-known, but is a thoroughly rewarding work. Mozart composed it in Salzburg in 1779, shortly after he returned from a catastrophic job-hunting trip to Paris, where he had been sent by his father, Leopold. (He failed to secure a steady position, and his mother, along as a chaperone, took ill and died while they were in Paris.) Though one of Mozart's long-term goals was to get out of the genial, but provincial town of Salzburg—and out from under his father's wing—he spent much of 1779-80 back at home, meekly serving as the Archbishop of Salzburg's court organist. While his duties were primarily composing and leading music for services at the cathedral, Mozart continued to write instrumental and theatrical works on the side.

The two-piano concerto he composed at this time was undoubtedly written for performance by himself and his sister Maria Anna—known affectionately as “Nannerl” in the Mozart family. Nannerl, five years older than her *Wunderkind* brother, was a fine pianist, and was taken on tour around Europe with Wolfgang (“Wolferl”) by their father, when they were both children. By 1779, she was keeping house for Leopold, who eventually arranged a marriage for her. Nannerl was a competent composer in her own right, and her brother encouraged her to continue, but there were no real professional musical opportunities for women in late 18th-century Austria outside of the opera stage. Just when brother and sister played the concerto, probably in a private concert in Salzburg, is unclear, but Mozart does mention having played the concerto with Nannerl in a diary entry of September 1780. The concerto was apparently a favorite of Mozart's, and after he moved to Vienna, he had his father send the music for a performance with one of his Viennese students, Josepha Auernhammer, in November 1781. Mozart played it again in May 1782, and at this performance he may have added parts for clarinets and trumpets, though these parts are usually considered optional.

Composing a two-piano concerto is a different kind of challenge than writing for a single solo instrument, and Mozart accomplished this with apparent ease. He and

Nannerl had performed on a single keyboard as children, but here the solo parts are expanded to separate pianos that take an equal partnership in the piece. Letters between the two are filled with rude jokes and teasing, and many points in this concerto there is a sense of wry humor in the many unexpected harmonic moments that leaves the listener to imagine a smile, or at least a sly wink from Mozart to Nannerl.

The opening *Allegro* begins with an orchestral *tutti* that lays out the first main group of themes. The soloists enter and restate this material in alternating phrases, before introducing a second group of slightly more lyrical ideas. The development section introduces some more agitated new ideas. After a recapitulation of the main ideas, with a few quirky turns, there is the usual cadenza—parceled out in this case between the two soloists. (The usual practice was to improvise cadenzas on the spot, but here—because there were two soloists involved—Mozart actually composed and wrote out cadenzas for the concerto.) The movement ends with short coda.

The *Andante* is a gentle three-way conversation among the two soloists and the orchestra, laying out a lyrical theme with a few surprising twists. There is a brief bit of operatic drama in the center, but the movement closes with a serene return of the main idea. Mozart follows with lively closing *Allegro*. This is in rondo form, with a single main idea dominating the music, but this is more weighty rondo than most, with a great deal of development, and several cunning ways to engineer a return to the main idea during the course of the piece. Again, there are unexpected turns as the two pianos develop the main theme, and a series of contrasting episodes. The movement closes with a lively duet-style cadenza and final statement of the main idea.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Symphony No.5, Op. 47

Shostakovich completed this work in 1937, and it was performed for the first time in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) on November 21, 1937, by the Leningrad Philharmonic, under the direction of Yevgeny Mravinsky. It has been played three times previously at our concerts, in 1980, 1993, and 2006. Duration 44:00.

In these days, when the Soviet Union is a historical memory, rather than a world power, totalitarian control by a state over the arts is thankfully rare around the world. In Josef Stalin's Soviet state, however, it was a powerful and controlling

reality. A manifesto outlining the principles of “Socialist Realism” appeared in 1933. This doctrine was originally intended to control the content and style of Soviet literature, but it was quickly adapted to the visual arts, film, and music. As explained in an article published by the Union of Soviet Composers: “The main attention of the Soviet composer must be directed towards the victorious progressive principles of reality, towards all that is heroic, bright, and beautiful. This distinguishes the spiritual world of Soviet man, and must be embodied in musical images full of beauty and strength. Socialist Realism demands an implacable struggle against those folk-negating modernistic directions typical of contemporary bourgeois art, and against subservience and servility towards modern bourgeoisie culture.” In practice, Soviet music of this period served the propaganda needs of the state, and was aimed at proletarian consumption. Composers abandoned “formalist” devices—unrestricted dissonance, twelve-tone technique, etc.—in favor of strictly tonal harmonies and folk music (Soviet composers produced dozens of works for balalaika ensemble and concertos for other folk instruments during this period).

Shostakovich struggled heroically within this system. There was a continuing pattern in his works of the 1930s and 1940s of perilously pushing the limits of official tolerance and then rehabilitating himself with a work that seemed to conform more closely to the Party line. In 1934, his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was a rousing success, and continued to run for over 100 performances. In 1936, however, Stalin himself attended a performance, and left the theater in a rage. Within a few days, a review of the opera appeared in *Pravda*, complaining of an “intentionally dissonant, muddled flow of sounds,” and angrily denouncing its anti-Socialist “distortion.” Shostakovich was quickly transformed from one of the young lions of Soviet music to a suspected Formalist, and articles published in *Pravda* (the official newspaper of the Soviet state) and the bulletin of the Composers’ Union began to reveal “modernistic” and “decadent” elements in many of his works that had previously been blessed by the critics. The composer immediately cancelled the premiere of his fourth symphony, fearing that the dissonant nature of this score would push the authorities too far. He was so certain, in fact, that Stalin’s goons would appear at his door that he kept a small suitcase in his apartment, packed for his trip to the Gulag Archipelago. A hastily-composed ballet glorifying life on a collective farm was not enough put him back in favor with the Composers’ Union, but with the performance of his *Symphony No.5* in November of 1937, Shostakovich regained a certain amount of his position in the hierarchy of Soviet musicians.

The usual story of the symphony's composition is that it was written very quickly, between April and July 1937. But in a note to his recently-published critical edition of the score, Manashir Iakubov shows that in fact it was a much more extensive process lasting from April up through just a few weeks before the November premiere. On its surface, the *Symphony No.5* seems to be a meek acquiescence—in fact Shostakovich humbly subtitled the work “The practical answer of a Soviet artist to justified criticism,” and it was composed in honor of the 20th anniversary of the 1917 revolution. In describing the fifth symphony at its premiere, Shostakovich wrote: “The theme of my symphony is the making of a man. I saw humankind, with all of its experiences at the center of this composition, which is lyrical in mood from start to finish. The Finale is the optimistic solution of the tragedy and tension of the first movement. ...I think that Soviet tragedy has every right to exist. However, the contents must be suffused with positive inspiration...” these are all safely Socialist sentiments—but hearing the *Symphony No.5*, we are struck not so much by the triumph and optimism of the Finale, but by the deeply personal anxiety and sense of suffering that underlies the entire work.

The premiere was a phenomenal success and Soviet officials were quick to investigate what all the fuss was about. The Committee on Art Affairs dispatched two of its members to Leningrad to hear a later performance, they explained that tempestuous applause at the end was because the promoters had hand-picked the audience, excluding “ordinary, normal people.” But a subsequent performance for hand-picked Party officials and guests was just as successful. Official suspicion persisted— one musical official cited the “unwholesome stir around this symphony”—but in this case, Soviet authorities seem to have decided to put a positive spin on the affair and accept the popularity of this work at face value. Glowing reviews followed in the official press. The review by composer Dmitri Kabalevsky was typical: “After hearing Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, I can boldly assert that the composer as truly great Soviet artist has overcome his mistakes and taken a new path.”

The audiences at these early performances were probably more perceptive, however. Many members of the audience wept at the premiere, and the applause following the performance lasted nearly half an hour—facts that were reported in the official press as an emotional response to the symphony's uplifting conclusion. As Shostakovich wrote some 25 years later (well after Stalin was safely dead and repudiated): “Someone who was incapable of understanding could never feel the Fifth Symphony. Of course they understood—they understood what was happening around them and they understood what the Fifth was about.” This work

was indeed a “response to criticism,” but it was a much more tragic and anguished response than the authorities chose to believe.

The tragic character of this symphony is established in the very opening bars (*Moderato*), in an angular, off-beat melody introduced by the low strings. Much of the beginning is devoted to an imitative exposition of this melody in the strings. A repeated rhythm appears in the lower strings, repeating incessantly beneath the second main theme, a lyrical melody in the first violins. This melody is built over the same large leaps as the opening theme, but here the effect is more melancholy than tragic. After flute and clarinet solos comment upon this theme, the horns introduce a more menacing march-like melody. This march increases in intensity until the climactic return of the opening theme. Near the close of the movement the second theme returns, now on a more hopeful note, in the solo flute.

For the main theme of the scherzo (*Allegretto*), Shostakovich parodies a melody from his *Symphony No.4*. The irony is obvious—here was a work that was unknown to the audience, and that, the composer felt, would never be performed. So the outward humor of this movement—bumptious bass lines, woodwind trills and tongue-in-cheek violin solos—overlays a bitterly sarcastic comment on Socialist Realism. A military-sounding waltz alternates with this main theme in the manner of a trio. At the end, he uses one of Beethoven’s favorite jokes: what seems to be yet another repeat of the trio, played hesitantly by a solo oboe, is brusquely tossed aside by the brass, and the movement ends abruptly

The third movement (*Largo*) belongs entirely to the strings and solo woodwinds. Shostakovich divides the string section into eight parts throughout this movement, weaving complex counterpoint around a single somber melody. Flutes and harp introduce a second subject which is gradually woven together with the first. In a very beautiful central passage, solo woodwinds expand on the main themes above an effectively simple background of string tremolos. The movement builds gradually towards its climax, a return of the first theme in the full string choir, before fading away at the end. Though it is overshadowed by the broad opening movement and the powerful finale, the *Largo* may have been the movement that had the deepest impact at the premiere. Much of the weeping in the audience took place during the *Largo*, leading biographer David Fanning to suggest that the movement was “...a channel for a mass grieving at the height of the Great Terror, impossible otherwise to express openly.”

The finale (*Allegro non troppo*) is set as a rondo, and brings the symphony to a properly jubilant finish. The main theme is an almost violent march, which

alternates with several quieter sections. Shostakovich brings back reminiscences of several moments from preceding movements, building towards a massive coda in D Major. The composer's own program note (and the official reviewers) described the finale as triumphant and exultant—but the exaltation may overlay a deeper sarcasm.

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