

PROGRAM NOTES FOR FEBRUARY 16 & 17, 2019

Pavane pour une infante défunte

Maurice Ravel

Born 7 March 1875 in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France

Died 28 December 1937 in Paris

Approximate duration: 6 minutes

The orchestra has previously performed this work four times: March 1984; February 1987; October 1993; and April 2009.

- Like many of Ravel's orchestral works, this one originated as a solo piano piece.
- *Pavane* is a slow, processional 16th- century court dance, probably of Italian origin.
- Ravel chose the title because he liked the way it sounded in French!

Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte* [Pavane for a dead princess] is a salon piece that made good. Written in 1899 for solo piano, it became enormously popular among the French bourgeoisie, considerably boosting Ravel's then slender reputation. His earliest surviving compositions date from 1893; this one was thus the first "big hit." Understandably he was quite critical of it in later years, writing in 1912:

Alas, its faults I can perceive only too well: the influence of Chabrier is much too glaring, and the structure rather poor. The remarkable interpretations on this inconclusive and conventional work have, I think, in great measure contributed to its success.

His reference to "remarkable interpretations" alludes to the title, which spurred countless romantic and literary fancies among its interpreters and listeners at the turn of the century. Ironically, Ravel confessed that his evocative title was primarily chosen because of its mellifluous alliterative appeal in his native tongue.

The Pavane, which Ravel orchestrated in 1910, shares with many of his other pieces a loose association with Spain (whose royal princesses are called "*infantas*"). Otherwise it is rather atypical of his music. The style is deliberately archaic, a concession to the slow, processional sixteenth-century Italian dance from which it takes its name. Major sevenths and ninths give it its rich harmonic aura. Even at age 24, Ravel knew how to establish and maintain a magical mood.

Ravel transcribed the *Pavane* for a small orchestra of two flutes, oboe, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, harp and muted strings.

Piano Concerto in G **Maurice Ravel**

Born 7 March, 1875 in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France

Died 28 December 1937 in Paris

Approximate duration: 23 minutes

The orchestra has performed Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major once before, in April 2007.

- Ravel came from France's Basque country; his Basque roots are prominent in this concerto.
- He worked on this simultaneously with the Concerto for Left Hand, but thought of the G major as "his" concerto.
- Listen for bitonal chords reminiscent of both Stravinsky and Milhaud.
- The soulful Adagio leads to a virtuosic, irresistible finale.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Ravel was forced to set aside a number of active projects as patriotic fervor and military necessity swept the country. According to his friend Gustave Samazeuilh, one of the shelved scores was a Rhapsody based on the Basque music of Ravel's native province. Much of the material from this relatively early, abandoned work was later reworked into the Piano Concerto in G.

By the time Ravel began serious work on his Concerto in 1929, more than a dozen years had elapsed. During the intervening time, of course, the war had ended. The composer had traveled to North America, where exposure to American jazz made an enormous impact on him. Further, he was now thinking in terms of a solo vehicle for himself, and began furious practice of difficult piano pieces by Chopin and Liszt in order to refine his technique and stimulate his own musical thinking.

Listeners will have little trouble in pinpointing the Gershwin-like flair with which Ravel assimilated jazz harmony and syncopation. They will love how he merges these elements with unexpected touches like the cadenzas for harp and woodwinds that precede the piano cadenza, and the solos for French horn and trumpet. Similarly, they will be enraptured by the simplicity and elegance of the slow-movement waltz, which draws on the understated, proto-minimalist lyricism of Erik Satie and the *ostinato* accompaniment of a Bach aria.

Ravel's finale opens with a snare drum roll, heralding a rambunctious, good-humored romp that challenges both pianistic technique and ensemble. Opening declarations from a saucy clarinet and slide trombones add piquancy to the whirlwind music. Later, a dazzling bassoon solo contributes its low-register impetus to the headlong rush.

The score calls for piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, B-flat clarinet, E-flat clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani, bass drum, snare drum, suspended cymbal, triangle, tam-tam, woodblock, whip, harp, solo piano and strings.

***Siempre Lunes, Siempre Marzo* [Always Monday, Always March]**

Reinaldo Moya

Born 20 December, 1984 in Caracas, Venezuela

Currently residing in Northfield, Minnesota

Approximate duration: 14 minutes

This is the orchestra's first performance of the work.

- Moya chose his title from a 1967 novel by Gabriel García Márquez.
- From its opening, magical and mysterious sounds inhabit this music.
- Listen for the composer's keen senses of rhythm combined with unusual instruments.

Venezuela's *El sistema* has become a world-famous model for incorporating music as a central component of a young person's education. Composer and violinist Reinaldo Moya is a product of the system, and one of its rising alumni stars. A founding member of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, he toured three continents with the ensemble, playing under superstar conductors Giuseppe Sinopoli, Claudio Abbado and Gustavo Dudamel.

After growing up in Venezuela, Moya attended West Virginia University, then earned masters and doctoral degrees at the Juilliard School. His principal composition teachers were John Beall, Samuel Adler and Robert Beaser. He currently serves as Assistant Professor of Composition at Augsburg University in Minnesota, and is composer-in-residence with that city's famed Schubert Club. His music has been widely performed in the Americas, Europe and Australia.

These performances have a special and personal resonance for Music Director Benjamin Rous because he and Moya's wife, violinist Francesca Anderegg, were college classmates and played together in several Boston-area chamber and orchestral ensembles. Plus: the two couples (Ben and Clara, and Reinaldo and Francesca) share a wedding anniversary: not only the same date, but the same year! "This made it complicated for some of our mutual friends who had to figure out how to attend both ceremonies!" chuckles Moya. "Anyhow, Ben and I have been talking for several years about making music together. I'm very excited that we have the opportunity to do so now."

Siempre lunes, siempre marzo takes its title and impetus from the writing of Gabriel García Márquez. Moya's composer's note explains:

The title of this work refers to Melquíades, the Gypsy's room in Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude. In this room time passes in a very peculiar way: it is always Monday, and always March. This piece is then based around the figure of Melquíades, who is one of the most intriguing characters in the novel. This orchestral work is not programmatic or narrative. Instead, each movement can be seen as a vignette inspired by the various aspects, or episodes related to Melquíades.

I. *Melquíades and the Gypsies Bring Ice to Macondo*

In the isolated (and imaginary) town of Macondo, progress only comes through the visits by a roving gang of gypsies. The famous opening line from the novel recounts Colonel Aureliano Buendía remembering a distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. I wanted to musically represent the opening of this magical book, so after a low rumble, the music appears to materialize in front of the listener as though it had been trapped inside a book and is now finally released. It's an entrancing and otherworldly release, and distant echoes of the gypsy caravan are heard twice.

Finally, we arrive at the magical moment in the piece where the novel's famous first line is referenced. This is a passage of iridescent beauty, which is meant to depict the moment when the children touch the ice, and feel its icy burn for the first time.

II. *Alchemy and the Little Golden Fish.*

Melquíades is responsible for bringing a variety of new technologies and ideas to Macondo, including alchemy. This area of study fascinates the young Aureliano Buendía, and he begins to make little fish made of gold, in his attempt to forget all about his love for Remedios the Beauty. The music in this movement is centered around one single motive that is omnipresent, yet always changing. The energy present in the music is reminiscent of the almost industrial zeal with which Aureliano continues to make the gold fish, even melting them once he's finished so that he may begin again.

Moya has a wonderful sense of the supernatural, transporting us through his own world of sound to places that seem to be floating through space on magic carpets, unimpeded by gravity. His music also draws on elements of minimalism, heavily spiced with the Latin rhythms that are clearly in his blood. Throughout, his luscious music bristles with color and pulse.

The score calls for three flutes (all doubling piccolo, 3rd also on alto flute), three oboes (third doubling English horn), three clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani (doubling on bass drum with rute and high log drum), a full percussion complement requiring three players [Player I: vibraphone, tambourine, suspended cymbal and *guiro*; Player II: glockenspiel, xylophone, bongos, snare drum, tam tam, low log drum, 5 rice bowls with different pitches, maracas, and crash cymbals; Player III: marimba and chimes] harp, piano/celesta and strings.

Variations on a Hungarian Folksong (*The Peacock*)

Zoltán Kodály

Born 16 December, 1882 in Kecskemét, Hungary

Died 6 March, 1967 in Budapest

Approximate duration: 25 minutes

This is the orchestra's first performance of the work.

- This piece is based on an ancient Hungarian song about freedom.
- Though it was commissioned by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Nazis forbade its performance during their occupation of Holland.
- The ambivalence of Hungarian character emerges, at once cynical, joyful and innocent.

Folk music is at the heart of national identity. Few composers have embraced folk heritage to the extent of Hungary's Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók. Friends and colleagues, they both traveled extensively through remote areas of Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East, collecting folk tunes. Inevitably, they assimilated these melodies, scale patterns and characteristic rhythms into their original compositions.

Both men retained a special affection for the indigenous songs of Hungary. When the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam commissioned Kodály to write a piece in honor of the orchestra's 50th anniversary jubilee, he found his source material in "Folszallott a pava" ["The Peacock"], a folk song from the Somogy district in southwestern Hungary. Kodály regarded it as quintessentially Hungarian. The text is a metaphorical cry for freedom:

Fly, peacock, fly,
Upon the county-house.
Poor prisoners
To deliver

The peacock flew
Upon the county-house,
But not prisoners to deliver.

The peacock flew
Upon the county-house,
Poor prisoners
To deliver.

Kodály's choice was no accident. As war threatened and fascism strengthened its hold on the European continent, he used this composition to make a political statement. Thus *Variations on a Hungarian Folksong* ("The Peacock") is both a plea for freedom and an expression of nationalism. When Willem Mengelberg conducted the premiere in Amsterdam on 23 November 1939, France and England had been at war with Germany for nearly three months, but the Nazis had not yet invaded the Netherlands. (That would occur

in May, 1940.) The music's message of national pride and resistance to fascism was not lost on the audience. During the occupation, the Nazis forbade performances of this work.

Kodály first used "The Peacock" in a piece for men's chorus in 1937, and would tap it again in one of the pieces in his *Bicinia Hungarica* (1941). These orchestral variations are, by far, his most ambitious treatment. The structure is roughly symmetrical: an introduction, 16 variations and a finale. Within that framework, Kodály traverses a broad landscape.

The theme is pentatonic (think the black keys of the piano), which gives the folk song a vaguely Far Eastern character. The slow introduction presents the tune in mysterious, rumbling low strings; timpani add quiet drama. Clarinet and bassoon enter in canon, but not until several minutes in do we hear a clear statement of the theme in an oboe solo.

Kodály's extended introduction builds suspense with great effect, then bursts forth with a gust of energy. Of the initial ten variations, only one exceeds a minute, and a half dozen of them are 30 seconds or less. They proceed sequentially, one blending seamlessly into the next. The music favors dance rhythms in duple time, with splendid coloristic variety contrasting the orchestra's instrumental groups.

The second cluster of variations, Nos. XI to XIV, are longer and slower. No. XII, an Adagio, is a giant slow crescendo with ominous commentary from the horns. After the climax, it subsides, leading to a funeral march (Var. XIII) with an unusual section solo for the trombones. Variation XIV, the last of the slow ones, features a gorgeous flute solo with harp and muted *tremolando* strings that expands into a magical swirl of bird calls.

Kodály's last two variations lead to the Finale, which pulses with the unmistakable energy of Hungarian dance in irregular three measure phrases. This conclusion is itself a ternary form. Two *vivace* sections enclose a grand peroration of the "Peacock" theme with a solo for the concertmaster. The exuberant conclusion is a thriller, radiant in its celebration of the now-familiar melody.

The score calls for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, glockenspiel, triangle, cymbals, harp and strings.



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