



ABOUT THE MUSIC

Boléro & Tchaikovsky

March 23, 24 & 25, 2024

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

HILDUR GUÐNADÓTTIR

Fólk fær andlit [People Get Faces] for String Orchestra



COMPOSER: born September 4, 1982, Reykjavík, Iceland

WORK COMPOSED: 2015, originally for chorus

WORLD PREMIERE: 2016

INSTRUMENTATION: originally for chorus and cello; also arranged for string orchestra

ESTIMATED DURATION: 5 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Hildur Guðnadóttir, who comes from a large family of musicians, fuses her classical cello training with experimental pop and contemporary art music. In her solo works, Guðnadóttir draws out a broad spectrum of sounds from her instrument, ranging from intimate simplicity to huge expansive soundscapes. In the last few years, Guðnadóttir's work has received worldwide attention, thanks to her Oscar-winning score for the 2019 film *The Joker*. She has won numerous awards for her other film and television work, including music for *Sicario: Day of the Soldado*; *Mary Magdalene*; *Tom of Finland*; *Journey's End*; and the Icelandic Scandinavian noir TV series *Trapped*. In September 2021, Guðnadóttir and her husband Sam Slater released their score for the video game *Battlefield 2042*.

In an interview, Guðnadóttir discussed the fundamental importance of timbre (musical color) in her work, as well as how time functions in her compositions. "A lot of my work is based on getting lost in timbre ... Time is also very important for me. I enjoy music the most which slows time down. I need time to take in every little nuance of a sound. I need to have time and space for breath within music. So when writing music these are elements that are almost always there. As a result, the music I write is normally quite slow."

Guðnadóttir composed *Fólk fær andlit* in 2015, as a response to the Icelandic government's deportation of Albanian child refugees and their families. She writes, "In December 2015 we followed a series of events that touched most of us there: Albanian children with terminal illnesses were deported from Iceland along with their families who had been denied residence permits. It was deeply distressing to watch the series of events unfold; how people divided into two separate oppositions, for or against – people." Many Icelanders were deeply moved by the refugees' plight, and ashamed of their government's actions.

Originally written for chorus, the voices repeat the Icelandic word *miskun* (mercy) and the phrase "*Fyrirgefið okkur fyrir*" (forgive us for). In the version for string orchestra, the slow measured phrases explore A minor scales, anchored by a solo cello drone.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major, Op. 35



COMPOSER: born May 7, 1840, Kamsko-Votinsk, Viatka province, Russia; died November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg

WORK COMPOSED: March 17, 1878 – April 11, 1878; first edition dedicated to Leopold Auer (Tchaikovsky dedicated the second edition to Adolf Brodsky)

WORLD PREMIERE: December 4, 1881. Hans Richter led the Vienna Philharmonic with violinist Adolf Brodsky

INSTRUMENTATION: solo violin, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 34 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Today, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's concertos, particularly his Piano Concerto No. 1 and his Violin Concerto, are perennial audience favorites and essential works in the piano and violin repertoires. In 1875, when Tchaikovsky completed the first Piano Concerto, he got a very different reaction: his friend and mentor Nicolai Rubinstein dismissed it as "vulgar" and "unplayable." Tchaikovsky experienced a similar reaction four years later, when Tchaikovsky presented Hungarian violinist Leopold Auer with his newly-written violin concerto; Auer called it "impossible" and refused to perform it. Fortunately, Auer later changed his mind about the Violin Concerto. Thanks in large part to Auer's advocacy, today Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto holds an undisputed place as one of the most popular and most frequently performed violin concertos. From the soloist's first entrance with the exuberant main theme, this concerto embodies Tchaikovsky's sound: an abundance of gorgeously singable melodies; heroic moments; and dramatic flourishes, such as the sudden transition from the gentle Canzonetta to the animated "vivacissimo" Finale.

In the spring of 1878, Tchaikovsky and a young, gifted violinist, Josif Kotek, went on holiday to Clarens, a small Swiss village near Montreux. During their three-week stay, Tchaikovsky composed the Violin Concerto, relying on Kotek's insights into the solo part. Tchaikovsky wanted to dedicate the concerto to Kotek, but told his publisher, "In order to avoid gossip of various kinds, I shall probably decide to dedicate it to Auer." It was Tchaikovsky's hope that Kotek would premiere the concerto, but Kotek expressed reservations about his own abilities and regretfully declined.

Tchaikovsky's "concerto curse" continued when the influential music critic Eduard Hanslick vilified both music and the composer. After describing Tchaikovsky as having no "discrimination or taste," Hanslick wrote, "For a while, it [the Violin Concerto] moves soberly, musically, and not without spirit. But soon vulgarity gains the upper hand and asserts itself to the end of closing the first movement ... Friedrich Visser once observed, speaking of obscene pictures, that they stink to the eye. Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto gives us for the first time the hideous notion that there can be music that stinks to the ear." This scathing review wounded Tchaikovsky deeply; according to biographer David Brown, "to the end of his days Tchaikovsky could recite Hanslick's diatribe by heart."

Many new works are initially maligned, but over time become widely popular and even beloved. It is hard to imagine what aspects of the concerto upset Hanslick, as the music abounds with graceful melodies and plenty of virtuoso pyrotechnics for the soloist. The Violin Concerto survived Hanslick's harsh assessment; today it is considered one of the shining jewels of the violin repertoire.

MICHAEL DJUPSTROM

Dreams of Flight for Large Orchestra (California Premiere)



COMPOSER: born August 23, 1980, St. Paul, MN

WORK COMPOSED: 2023

WORLD PREMIERE: Francisco Lecce-Chong led the Eugene Symphony on February 1, 2024, in Eugene, OR

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, bass drum, chimes, Chinese cymbal, crash cymbals, crotales, large ratchet, large suspended cymbal, medium suspended cymbal, slapstick, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tambourine, tam-tam, tom-toms, triangle, vibraphone, xylophone, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 25 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Composer/pianist and music educator Michael Djupstrom's music has earned prestigious awards and fellowships from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the MacDowell Colony, and the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, among others, and he has been commissioned by a growing list of artists and organizations across America, including the Curtis Institute, Tanglewood Music Center, the Dover Quartet, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Djupstrom currently teaches chamber music at the University of Pennsylvania and maintains a private studio of piano and composition students.

In a recent interview, Djupstrom discussed his first symphony, which he has titled "Dreams of Flight." "In a general sense, most of the music I write is very abstract, and so I usually come up with a title at the very end of the process," he explains. "I think that the title matters, not only because it's a way to package the piece and present it to an audience, but also if you call your piece Sonata or Symphony and leave it at that, it doesn't resonate with most people these days. So I wanted some kind of poetic title that makes you think in a certain direction."

Djupstrom had originally intended the symphony to be structured in two large movements, but found, while writing, that he needed what he calls an "interlude" in between. "As I was writing it, it took on this idea of something that was associated with the air." To reflect this quality, Djupstrom opens the interlude with multiple *divisi* (divided) strings to create "a cloudy background," with a flute solo soaring over the top. Djupstrom continues, "When I began orchestrating, I realized that the first moment seemed kind of watery; nothing is unclear, but the music reflects the swirling instability of water and things swimming in the water, or even flying in the water. At the structural and emotional climax of the first movement, the music flies. Some giant thing has gotten above the surface, and it flies around for a little bit, so I gave the symphony a working title, 'Flight.' But the last movement doesn't have anything to do with flight in itself; it feels a lot more like running, and I realized that running in itself was a kind of flight, the other meaning of flight – escape. The third movement is the weirdest of the three movements, for sure. The music runs and runs as fast as it can until it finally takes off and hovers for a bit."

MAURICE RAVEL

Boléro for Orchestra



COMPOSER: born March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France; died December 28, 1937, Paris

WORK COMPOSED: 1928

WORLD PREMIERE: Originally written as a ballet for Ida Rubenstein, which premiered November 22, 1928, at the Paris Opéra, conducted by Walter Straram. Ravel first presented *Boléro* as a concert work with the Lamoureux Orchestra in Paris on January 11, 1930.

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, oboe d'amore, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, celesta, cymbals, snare drum, tam-tam, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 14 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

From the snare drum's opening roll, before the infamous melody begins, we instantly recognize *Boléro*. This compelling music has entered popular culture through various media: the 1979 film *10*; numerous television commercials; the sci-fi hit TV show *Dr. Who*, and the gold medal-winning performance by ice dancers Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean at the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics.

Maurice Ravel would not have been surprised by *Boléro*'s enduring popularity. While he worked on it, the composer commented, "The piece I am working on will be so popular, even fruit peddlers will whistle it in the street." Originally a ballet commission from Ida Rubenstein, formerly of Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, *Boléro* was choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska, sister of Vaslav Nijinsky, and featured a Gypsy woman dancing on a table in a Spanish tavern, who whips her audience into an uncontrolled sexual frenzy.

Rubenstein's ballet was successful, but *Boléro*'s lasting fame came in the concert hall, most notably from a controversial performance conducted by Arturo Toscanini in 1930. Not all listeners were seduced, however. One critic described *Boléro* as "... the most insolent monstrosity ever perpetrated in the history of music ... it is simply the incredible repetition of a single rhythm ... and above it is the blatant recurrence of an overwhelmingly vulgar cabaret tune."

In response, Ravel wrote a letter in 1931 to the London *Daily Telegraph*: "It [*Boléro*] is an experiment in a very special and limited direction, and it should not be suspected of aiming at achieving anything different from, or anything more than, it actually does achieve. Before the first performance, I issued a warning to the effect that what I had written was a piece ... consisting wholly of orchestral texture without music – of one long, very gradual crescendo ... I have done exactly what I have set out to do, and it is for listeners to take it or leave it."

In 2012, the award-winning science podcast *Radiolab* presented an episode titled "Unraveling Bolero," which suggested that Ravel might have been experiencing early symptoms of frontotemporal dementia (a degenerative brain disease involving the frontal lobe of the brain), as he wrote *Boléro*. One aspect of this disease manifests as an obsessive need for repetition, which is reflected in *Boléro*'s complete lack of thematic or rhythmic musical development. Six years after finishing *Boléro*, Ravel began to forget words and lose short-term memory. By 1935, two years before his death, he could no longer write or speak.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today," (now heard on American Public Media).