The Stradivarius Ensemble of the Mariinsky Orchestra

Valery Gergiev: Music Director and Conductor
Behzod Abduraimov: Piano

WHEN:
SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 29, 2017
2:30 PM

VENUE:
BING CONCERT HALL
Program

Edvard Grieg: From Holberg’s Time, op. 40 (1885)

Prelude
Sarabande
Gavotte
Air
Rigaudon

Richard Strauss: Metamorphosen (1945)

—INTERMISSION—

Dmitri Shostakovich: Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Minor, op. 35 (1933)

Allegretto
Lento
Moderato
Allegro con brio

Behzod Abduraimov, Piano
Timur Martynov, Trumpet

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Serenade for Strings, op. 48 (1880)

Pezzo in forma di Sonatina
Valse
Élégie
Finale (Tema russo)

Program Notes

Edvard grieg (1843–1907)

From Holberg’s Time, op. 40 (1885)

For the bicentennial of Norway’s most distinguished writer, Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), composer Edvard Grieg penned two tributes: a cantata for men’s voices and a piano suite titled From Holberg’s Time. The next year, Grieg reworked his Baroque-inspired piano suite into an arrangement for string orchestra.

Decades before “neoclassical” music became trendy, Grieg’s “Suite in the Olden Style” (as he subtitled it) mined the Baroque conventions of the dance suite that had flourished during Holberg’s life. The Prelude launches the suite with a galloping rhythm, establishing an exciting, propulsive mood. Moving into the sequence of dances, the Sarabande steps patiently through the ornate, three-beat pulse of a style that came to Spain by way of its American colonies. The Gavotte, a muscular dance from France, begins with the customary lead-in of two strong beats. A contrasting section takes the form of a Musette, characterized by its droning accompaniment inspired by bagpipes.

The Air leaves dance forms aside for a long, singing melody in a melancholy minor key. The closing Rigaudon introduces one more lively French dance style, while also delving into the Baroque tradition of the concerto grosso, with soloists—here a violin and viola—offsetting the texture of the full string sections.
Richard Strauss (1864–1949)
Metamorphosen (1945)

Richard Strauss was in the twilight of his epic career when Hitler came to power. The Nazis held up Strauss as an Aryan ideal, and his occasional cooperation with the Third Reich led to the widespread belief that Strauss was a Nazi sympathizer. In reality, Strauss just wanted to stay out of the fray; he once said, “I just sit here in Garmisch and compose, everything else is irrelevant to me.” Strauss retreated to Garmisch, a small town nestled in the Bavarian Alps, when Vienna became too dangerous. He cloistered his Jewish daughter-in-law and grandsons there, managing to protect them even as his efforts to save other in-laws from the concentration camps failed.

Whatever ambivalence Strauss had toward his country’s ruling powers, he was dismayed by the cultural destruction around him. Allied bombs leveled the Munich Opera House in 1943, the Goethe House in Frankfurt (which Strauss called “the most sacred place on earth”) in 1944, and the opera houses in Berlin and Dresden in the first months of 1945. Strauss had by then begun working on a composition for strings, commissioned by the Swiss conductor Paul Sacher for his Zurich ensemble. Strauss started the full score on March 13, 1945, the day after the Vienna State Opera burned in another bombing.

Strauss took the title for Metamorphosen from Goethe, and the principal melody bears a strong resemblance to the Funeral March from Beethoven’s Eroica Symphony. This music was more than an homage to lost opera houses and significant cultural sites; it was an elegy for the entire legacy of German cultural achievement. He finished the score on April 12, around the same time Allied forces reached Garmisch, and just weeks before the German surrender.

Strauss subtitled the work A Study for 23 Solo Strings, and he wrote individual lines for each of the ten violins, five violas, five cellos and three basses. The form consists of a single movement, with slow sections bookending an agitated central episode. The continuity and evolution of the musical material matches the title, which calls to mind the radical transformations in which caterpillars emerge as butterflies.

Strauss’ Metamorphosen is steeped in death—he even marked the score with the words “In memoriam” on the last page, when the basses quote Beethoven directly—and yet this beautiful music, composed by a man nearly 80 years old whose world had been reshaped in unimaginable ways, is vibrant and generative. It is a fitting reflection of Goethe’s The Metamorphosis of Plants, which elaborated the idea that a single leaf contained all the potential from which a plant could grow, produce seeds, and begin the cycle anew.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)
Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Minor, op. 35 (1933)

As of 1933, when Shostakovich composed the Piano Concerto No. 1, his recent work on theater, ballet, film and opera projects had helped him crystallize his acerbic sense of humor, and his music still exuded a youthful sassiness—a quality he repressed in the wake of a harrowing rebuke from Stalin.

Shostakovich composed the First Concerto to perform himself, surrounding the piano with a lean accompaniment of strings and trumpet. The trumpet part is unusual in that it stands out from the orchestra, and yet it is not a full concerto partner to the piano soloist. Instead, the trumpet functions as a wry commentator, sometimes skewing the music toward dance hall exuberance, other times imparting a militaristic discipline.

Shostakovich gave the first performance in Leningrad on October 15, 1933, joined by the trumpeter he had in mind when he wrote the part, Aleksandr Shmidt of the Leningrad Philharmonic.

The concerto opens with a short, biting introduction, leading directly into the first thematic statement. The piano provides a few measures of its own bass accompaniment and then begins a melody fashioned after the start of Beethoven’s “Appassionata” Sonata. (The telltale fragment borrowed from Beethoven is a descending minor triad in a dotted rhythm—similar to the first three notes of The Star-Spangled Banner.) A galloping theme in a major key serves as incongruous secondary material, charting an uneasy intersection between the hilarious
and the grotesque. The mixed emotions of the first movement settle on the pensive side, the piano joined only by long, quiet tones from the trumpet.

The second movement is a melancholy waltz, with the lyrical melody first sung by muted strings. In the wake of the conflicted opening movement, this music is entirely sincere and introspective, marked by ruminative passages for unaccompanied piano. Even the trumpet, emerging out of a hushed series of string chords, sets aside its joking to take a turn at the docile waltz theme.

A short Moderato movement provides a rhapsodic bridge to the finale. The violins introduce the playful main theme built on repeated notes and leaps, and the music bounds through a range of moods and tempos. There is a bawdy, saloon-like quality to some of the piano figures, perhaps not far off from the kind of music Shostakovich played when he accompanied silent films in his student days. The piano saves one more parody for the cadenza, a harmonically restless reimagining of Beethoven's Rondo a capriccio in G Major (better known by its nickname, "The Rage over a Lost Penny"). The concerto signs off with a bright and raucous fanfare.

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)
Serenade for Strings, op. 48 (1880)

In the summer of 1880, Tchaikovsky vacationed at his sister's estate in Kamianka, Ukraine. In a letter to his patron and confidante, Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky wrote, "How fickle my plans are, whenever I decide to devote a long time to rest! I had just begun to spend a series of entirely idle days, when there came over me a vague feeling of discomfort and real sickness; I could not sleep and suffered from fatigue and weakness. Today I could not resist sitting down to plan my next symphony—and immediately I became well and calm and full of courage."

Tchaikovsky's plan for that music wavered between a symphony and a string quartet, until he landed on something in between: a serenade for string orchestra. The title and form of the work paid homage to Mozart, the greatest composer of Classical serenades, about whom Tchaikovsky once wrote in his diary, "Mozart I love as a musical Christ. … It is my profound conviction that Mozart is the highest, the culminating point which beauty has reached in the sphere of music. Nobody has made me cry and thrill with joy, sensing my proximity to something that we call the ideal, in the way that he has."

Tchaikovsky wrote the Serenade in little more than a month, even with some of that time devoted to a concurrent project, the 1812 Overture. Again writing to von Meck, Tchaikovsky explained, "The overture will be very showy and noisy, but it will have no artistic merit because I wrote it without warmth and love." Drawing a comparison, he continued, "I wrote the Serenade on impulse. I felt it deeply, from start to finish, and therefore I dare to believe it will not be without merit."

The Serenade for Strings offers up its emotions unabashedly, with Tchaikovsky's lush Romanticism enveloping the skeletal traces of Classical style. The grand and reverent choral that starts and ends the first movement defies the unassuming heading, "Piece in the form of a Sonatina," while the Allegro moderato body of the movement progresses in spare and efficient strides.

Tchaikovsky was one of the all-time great tunesmiths, and also a master of music for dance; those two talents comingle in the Serenade's graceful and effervescent Waltz. The Elegy counterbalances that dancing exuberance with a somber but no less artful statement. In the finale, the "Russian theme" promised by the subtitle is an amalgamation of folk material taken from a collection by Tchaikovsky's onetime champion, Mily Balakirev. The main theme traces the same descending contour as the work's initial choral, a link that is made explicit when that opening ceremonial music returns, just before the related fast theme reignites for a final scamper to the finish. © 2017 Aaron Grad
The Stradivarius Ensemble of the Mariinsky Orchestra

The Stradivarius Ensemble of the Mariinsky Orchestra is comprised by more than two dozen musicians of the Mariinsky Orchestra and are all great performers in their own right. They perform on a collection of early and unique-sounding string instruments made by the greatest Italian craftsmen. The ensemble was founded in 2009 on the initiative of Valery Gergiev, Artistic and General Director of the Mariinsky Theatre.

Each instrument performed on by the musicians of the Stradivarius Ensemble is in itself a masterpiece with its own history, filled with legendary memories. There are extremely rare instruments made by Amati, Stradivari, Guarneri, Guadagnini, and Gofriller.

The instruments of Nicolò Amati, one of the founding members of the renowned Cremona school, stand apart for their tender and often songful timbre. This master craftsman created the original model now known as the “Grand Amati,” which retained the genius’ “trademark” sound but also took on a richer and deeper timbre. There are extremely few instruments made by Nicolò Amati still in existence today and all are incredibly valuable.

Amati’s brilliant pupil Antonio Stradivari continued to perfect the work of his teacher. Having attained a songful and pliant sound, he made the form of the instruments more curved and devoted great attention to their adornment. The most magnificent works of the so-called “Golden Age” (1698-1725) stand apart for their magnificent ornamentation and the beauty of their timbre.

The Stradivarius Ensemble’s instruments also include examples of another acclaimed pupil of Amati—Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù. The sound of his instruments is remarkable for its power and spirit; connoisseurs often value his instruments even more than those of Stradivari. Paganini’s favorite violin was made by Guarneri: this legendary musician referred to it as a “Cannon” (Can-
none) because of its incredibly powerful sound. Guarneri’s instruments have been the instruments of choice of such musicians as Henri Vieuxtemps (his violin is currently the most valuable string instrument worth a record eighteen million dollars), Eugène Ysaÿe, and Fritz Kreisler.

The timbre of the instruments of Giovanni Battista Guadagnini—a maestro who worked at the courts of various Italian aristocrats—is remarkable for the exceptional noble quality of the sound. Guadagnini’s cellos are particularly valuable, the craftsman having modelled his version of the instrument in collaboration with the brilliant cellist Carlo Ferrari, one of the greatest virtuosi of his day.

Matteo Goffriller, the founder of the Venetian school of string instruments, is also famous as a master cello-maker. Pablo Casals performed on a Goffriller cello.

Valery Gergiev,  
Music Director & Conductor

Valery Gergiev is Artistic and General Director of the Mariinsky Theatre, Principal Conductor of the Munich Philharmonic, Principal Conductor of the World Orchestra for Peace, Chair of the Organizational Committee of the International Tchaikovsky Competition, Honorary President of the Edinburgh International Festival and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the St. Petersburg State University.

As head of the Mariinsky Theatre, Gergiev has established and directs such international festivals as the ‘Stars of the White Nights’ festival (St. Petersburg), the ‘Moscow Easter Festival’ and the ‘Gergiev Rotterdam Philharmonic Festival,’ Mikkeli Festival, and the 360 Degrees festival in Munich.

He has led numerous composer cycles including Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), Henri Dutilleux (b. 1916), Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) in New York, London, Paris and other international cities and he has introduced audiences around the world to several rarely performed Russian operas.

Maestro Gergiev staged a production of Richard Wagner’s tetralogy Der Ring des Nibelungen in the original German language, the first such production in Russian history, and led that production in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Seoul, Tokyo, New York, and London. Gergiev also champions contemporary Russian composers such as Rodion Shchedrin (b. 1932), Boris Tishchenko (1939-2010), Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931), Alexander Raskatov (b. 1953), and Pavel Smelkov.

The Mariinsky label established in 2009 has released more than thirty discs and DVDs to date that have received great acclaim from the critics and the public throughout the world; recordings include symphonies and piano concerti by Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich, operas by Wagner, Massenet and Donizetti, Prokofiev’s ballets Romeo and Juliet and Cinderella and the operas The Gambler and Semyon Kotko. Recent releases include Shchedrin’s The Left-Hander (DVD) and Tchaikovsky’s The Nutcracker and Symphony No. 4.
Behzod Abduraimov, Piano

Behzod Abduraimov has worked with leading orchestras worldwide. These include the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, NHK Symphony and Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestras, and prestigious conductors including Valery Gergiev, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Manfred Honeck, Vasily Petrenko, James Gaffigan, Jakub Hrůša, and Vladimir Jurowski.

Following his spectacular debut at the BBC Proms with the Münchner Philharmoniker under Gergiev in July 2016, Behzod immediately returned in July 2017. This was followed by his debut at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden and Rheingau Musik Festivals.

Upcoming European highlights include the Lucerne Festival, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Münchner Philharmoniker, hr-Sinfonieorchester, Philharmonia, Czech Philharmonic, and BBC Symphony orchestras. Recent notable dates include NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester as part of the Elbphilharmonie opening, and the London Symphony Orchestra. In recital he is one of the featured artists for the Junge Wilde series at the Konzerthaus Dortmund and will be presented in recital at the main halls of the Barbican, London, and Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Behzod will also collaborate in recital with the cellist Truls Mørk, which will see them on tour in Europe and the US.

In North America Behzod appears at the Hollywood Bowl, Blossom and Ravinia Festivals. He will make his debut with the San Francisco Symphony and returns to Dallas and Atlanta Symphony orchestras. Last season, Behzod gave his Stern Auditorium recital following his debut success at Carnegie Hall in 2015 and has appeared in concerts with the Houston Symphony and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and Minnesota Orchestra.

An award-winning recording artist—his debut recital CD won both the Choc de Classica and the Diapason Découverte—Behzod released his first concerto disc in 2014 on Decca Classics which features Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No.3 and Tchaikovsky’s Concerto No.1 with the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della Rai under Juraj Valčuha.

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1990, Behzod began to play the piano at the age of five as a pupil of Tamara Popovich at Uspensky State Central Lyceum in Tashkent. He is an alumnus of Park University’s International Center for Music where he studied with Stanislav Ioudenitch, and now serves as the ICM’s artist-in-residence.
The Stradivarius Ensemble of the Mariinsky Orchestra
Valery Gergiev, Music Director and Conductor

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Stanislav Izmailov
Anton Kozmin
Dina Zikeeva
Danara Urgadulova
Ekaterina Gribanova
Kirill Murashko

SECOND VIOLIN
Elena Luferova
Natalia Polevaya
Olesya Kryzhova

VIOLA
Yuri Afonkin
Dinara Muratova
Ivanova Irina
Anikeev Mikhail
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[Image of Valery Gergiev conducting]