Concerts of Thursday, March 12, at 8:00p, and Saturday, March 14, 2015, at 7:30p.

John Storgårds, Conductor

Ingrid Fliter, piano

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)

Rhapsodic Overture: *A Fantasy Journey to the Faroe Islands*, FS 123 (1927)

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra in F minor, Opus 21 (1829-30)

I. *Maestoso*

II. *Larghetto*

III. *Allegro vivace*

Ingrid Fliter, piano

Intermission

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Opus 27 (1907)

I. *Largo; Allegro molto*

II. *Allegro molto*

III. *Adagio*

IV. *Allegro vivace*
Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Rhapsodic Overture: A Fantasy Journey to the Faroe Islands, FS 123 (1927)

Carl Nielsen was born in Sortelung, Denmark, on June 9, 1865, and died in Copenhagen, Denmark, on October 3, 1931. The first performance of the Rhapsodic Overture: A Fantasy Journey to the Faroe Islands, took place in Denmark at the Royal Theater, on November 27, 1927, with the composer conducting. The Rhapsodic Overture is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, tambourine, cymbal, bass drum and strings. Approximate performance time is ten minutes.

Carl Nielsen's Rhapsodic Overture: A Fantasy Journey to the Faroe Islands, was commissioned by the Royal Theater in Copenhagen. The Theater commissioned the work as part of a gala concert celebrating a visit from the Faroe Islands (an archipelago located between Iceland and Norway). The concert, originally scheduled for mid-January, 1927, included performances of Faroese national dances. A flu epidemic, and a resulting ban on dancing in public venues postponed the concert until November 27. Nielsen then led the Rhapsodic Overture's premiere at the Royal Theater.

A few days before the premiere, Nielsen gave a newspaper interview, during which he provided an invaluable description of his Rhapsody Overture. That interview is reprinted in Carl Nielsen, Orchestral Works 2, Niels Bo Foltmann, Peter Hauge, editors (Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 2004):

I begin by describing the sea, as it is sensed during the voyage up there—the monotonous mighty sea. It is quiet, but I think that it is precisely on the calm sea that one most strongly senses its terrible depth...its depth and endlessness at the same time. During the voyage we suddenly hear a bird cry that makes us think that we are near land. Of course generally speaking I am no great lover of program music, but this time I think that the occasion called for a program for the journey...some people on board now seem to see land, they get enthusiastic, a fanfare tells you that, but the mist obscures the view, and it falls calm again. Then new bird cries rise up, and the land looms ahead. The music grows in volume and seriousness and breaks into a Faroese melody; on land many people are standing to welcome us, and we hear their shouting and stamping. With no explanatory transition I now place the traveler in the midst of a feast, with singing and dancing. I depict this feast in strong music where the ballad motifs play a role—and the depiction of the feast is interrupted by a Faroese folk tune. It calms down the music for a moment, creates a mood of gentleness amidst the dancing.
But again the feast livens up to dancing and merriment, until the end—then it all subsides in one long note, a very low clarinet note that quietly fades out...

Three days after the premiere, Nielsen again conducted the Rhapsody Overture, with the Copenhagen Philharmonic at City Hall. The printed program delineated the following sections of the work: “The Calm Sea—The Land on Arrival—Dancing and Singing—Farewell—Calm at Sea”.

Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra in F minor, Opus 21 (1829-30)

Frédéric Chopin was born in Żelazowa Wola, Poland, on March 1, 1810, and died in Paris, France, on October 17, 1849. The first performance of the F-Minor Piano Concerto took place at the National Theater in Warsaw, Poland, on March 17, 1830, with the composer as soloist. In addition to the solo piano, the Concerto is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-three minutes.


Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: October 4, 5 and 6, 2007, Garrick Ohlsson, Piano, Robert Spano, Conductor.

“I have met my ideal”

During the period that Frédéric Chopin composed his F-minor Concerto, he was in the midst of an infatuation. The young pianist and composer had fallen hopelessly in love with a fellow student at the Warsaw Conservatory, a soprano by the name of Constantia Gladkowska. For whatever reason, Chopin chose not to reveal his feelings to the young woman. Instead, Chopin poured his heart out to his dearest friend, Tytus Woyciechowski. In a letter of September 18, 1830, Chopin confessed:

When I ponder myself, I am troubled to see how often I lose the notion of reality! While my eyes are struck by things that interest me a great deal, horses could walk over my body and I wouldn’t feel a thing. That’s almost what happened to me on Sunday. Struck by an unexpected look at church (from Constantia), just when I had fallen prey to an adorable torpor. I was so disturbed that I couldn’t say what happened during the ensuing quarter of an hour. In the street, I ran into Doctor Parys and, not knowing how to explain my distraction, I had to invent a dog which, having gotten under my feet, had made me lose my balance!

In another letter to Woyciechowski, dated October 3, 1829, Chopin stated:

Perhaps to my misfortune, I have met my ideal and have served her faithfully for six months, without speaking to her about my feelings. I dream about it: under her inspiration, the adagio (i.e.,
the slow movement, actually marked *Larghetto* of my Concerto in F Minor and, this morning, the little waltz (Opus 70, No. 3 in D-flat) that I’m sending you, have been born. No one will know about it, except you.

“The Paganini of the piano”

The premiere of Chopin’s Piano Concerto in F minor was featured at his Warsaw concert debut, which took place at the National Theater on March 17, 1830. As was typical of the time, Chopin did not perform the Concerto’s three movements in an uninterrupted sequence. Following an overture, Chopin played the Concerto’s opening movement. Then, a musician by the name of Görner played a piece for hunting horn. The first half of the concert ended with the Concerto’s final two movements. During the second half, Chopin offered a brilliant “Potpourri on Polish Airs.”

The concert was a critical success. One writer, referring to the great Italian violinist, dubbed Chopin “the Paganini of the piano.” Another critic for a Warsaw paper enthused:

> The night before last represented a true thrill for all those who love the great art. Our compatriot, Mr. Chopin, demonstrated in his Concerto that he had the courage to disregard that weakness—so frequently found here—of imitating blindly those masters who, thanks to people who are supposed to determine our tastes…sit on the musical thrones of Europe…Though Chopin is still an adolescent, he follows the road to genius laid out by his predecessors, marching with virile fortitude to the temple of Euterpe…but treading a new path of his own.

Chopin was able to offer a far more dispassionate analysis. Ten days after the concert, he wrote to Titus Woyciechowski:

> Well then, my first concert, although it was sold out and there was not a box or seat to be had three days beforehand, did not make on the general public the impression I thought it would. The first Allegro of my concerto, which relatively few could grasp, called forth applause, but it seems to me that people felt they had to show interest (“Ah, something new!”) and pretend to be connoisseurs. The Adagio and Rondo produced the greatest effects and exclamations of sincere admiration could be heard. But the Potpourri on Polish Airs did not in my opinion fully achieve its aim. They applauded because they felt they must show at the end that they had not been bored.

It was not be long before Chopin bade farewell to his homeland. On October 11, 1830, Chopin appeared at the Warsaw National Theater in the premiere of his Piano Concerto in E minor. Although Chopin composed this Concerto after the F-minor, it was published earlier, and therefore is designated as his First.
That concert proved to be Chopin’s last in Poland. The following year, Chopin moved to Paris, where he lived for the remainder of his life. While Chopin continued to write prolifically for the piano, he never wrote another concerto for that instrument.

Musical Analysis

I. Maestoso—The Concerto opens with an orchestral presentation of the principal thematic material. The first theme, initially played softly by the violins, is soon punctuated by fortissimo outbursts. The winds introduce the lovely, second principal theme. The soloist enters with a grand flourish and proceeds to offer highly elaborate versions of the themes. The soloist’s music becomes ever more animated, leading to a vigorous orchestral tutti. The development opens quietly, but the passion soon increases, culminating in another orchestral tutti. The soloist reprises the principal themes, and predominates throughout the remainder of the movement, capped by a final orchestral exclamation.

II. Larghetto—This is the movement inspired by Chopin’s youthful infatuation for Constantia Gladkowska. A brief orchestral introduction features a dialogue between the strings and winds. The soloist enters with a wide-ranging and elaborate melody. A terse exchange between the soloist and orchestra leads to the agitated, central episode, featuring tremolo strings and passionate declarations by the soloist. A cascade by the soloist serves as the bridge to a reprise of the mood of the opening section. The Larghetto concludes with the piano’s breathtaking, upward arpeggio.

III. Allegro vivace—The finale evokes the spirit of the Polish mazurka, a lively dance in triple time. It serves as the basis for the numerous, engaging flights by the soloist. A solo horn announces the brilliant final section, in which the soloist’s passagework moves at lightning speed. After a brief pause, the finale rushes to a joyous close.

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Opus 27 (1907)

Sergei Rachmaninov was born in Semyonovo, Russia, on April 1, 1873, and died in Beverly Hills, California, on March 28, 1943. The first performance of the Second Symphony took place in St. Petersburg, Russia, on January 26, 1908, with the composer conducting. The Second Symphony is scored for piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, orchestra bells, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum and strings. Approximate performance time is sixty minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performance: November 24, 1953, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.


“A Conservatory in Hell”
Sergei Rachmaninov completed his First Symphony in August of 1895. Thanks in large part to the efforts of composers Sergei Taneyev and Alexander Glazunov, the Symphony received its premiere at the Hall of the Nobility in St. Petersburg (now St. Petersburg Philharmonic Hall) on March 15, 1897.

Glazunov conducted, but it seems he didn’t do much to advance the cause of Rachmaninov’s new composition. A few months later, Rachmaninov lamented to his friend, Alexander Zatayevich:

I am amazed how such a highly talented man as Glazunov can conduct so badly. I am not speaking now of his conducting technique (one can’t ask that of him) but about his musicianship. He feels nothing when he conducts. It’s as if he understands nothing...So I assume that the performance might have been the cause of the failure. (I do not say for certain; I am just assuming.) If the public had been familiar with the symphony, then they would have blamed the conductor (I continue to “assume”); if a symphony is both unfamiliar and badly performed, then the public is inclined to blame the composer.

Rachmaninov remained backstage during the entire March 15 premiere. After the wretched performance, Rachmaninov escaped to the street, rather than face the audience’s negative reaction. Still, he could not avoid the ire of such critics as composer César Cui, who wrote:

If there were a conservatory in Hell, if one of its many talented students were instructed to write a programme symphony on the “Seven Plagues of Egypt,” and if he were to compose a symphony like Mr. Rachmaninov’s, then he would have fulfilled his task brilliantly and would delight the inhabitants of Hell.

Rachmaninov’s First Symphony was neither performed again nor published during the composer’s lifetime.

“Does anybody need music like this?”

The disastrous premiere of the First Symphony precipitated a three-year crisis for the young Rachmaninov, who lost all confidence in his abilities as a composer. In 1900, Princess Alexandra Liven attempted to lift Rachmaninov’s spirits by arranging for him to visit Leo Tolstoy. Rachmaninov met Tolstoy on two occasions, the second time accompanied by the Russian basso, Feodor Chaliapin. But the encounters with Tolstoy did little to buoy Rachmaninov’s confidence. In fact, they only served to heighten his feelings of inadequacy. After Rachmaninov gathered the nerve to play one of his compositions for Tolstoy, the author responded by inquiring: “Tell me, does anybody need music like this?”

However, a breakthrough for Rachmaninov occurred that same year. On the advice of relatives, Rachmaninov consulted Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a psychiatrist who used hypnosis in the treatment of his patients. The consultations with Dr. Dahl were an extraordinary success. Rachmaninov experienced a tremendous
resurgence of confidence and immediately began to compose his Second Piano Concerto (1901), a work he dedicated to Dr. Dahl.

The Second Symphony

Rachmaninov even summoned the courage to attempt another Symphony. In the fall of 1906, Rachmaninov and his family moved from their native Russia to Dresden. The relocation offered Rachmaninov the solitude he needed to devote himself entirely to composition. In October, Rachmaninov began his Second Symphony, and finished the first draft of the score on New Year’s Day, 1907. Rachmaninov tried to keep the project a secret, but a Russian newspaper announced the Symphony’s completion. In February of 1907, Rachmaninov admitted to his friend, Mikhail Slonov:

I have composed a symphony. It’s true! It’s only ready in rough. I finished it a month ago, and immediately put it aside. It was a severe worry to me and I am not going to think about it any more. But I am mystified how the newspapers got into it!

Rachmaninov later refined the score of his Second Symphony and conducted its premiere in St. Petersburg on January 26, 1908. The work’s favorable reception by the audience and critics did much to vindicate Rachmaninov after the humiliating premiere of his First Symphony. The Second Symphony proved to be immensely popular throughout Rachmaninov’s life, and remains one of his most beloved orchestral works. The rich orchestration and passionate melodies make it one of the finest Russian symphonies of the late Romantic era.

Musical Analysis

I. Largo; Allegro moderato—The Symphony opens with an extended slow introduction (Largo). The cellos and basses intone a motif that will serve as the basis for much of the Symphony’s thematic material. The violins then introduce a more flowing melody that is prevalent throughout the introduction. The music grows ever more passionate, and then subsides. A brief English horn solo leads to the Allegro moderato portion of the movement. The violins present the first principal theme (molto espressivo), closely related to the cello and bass motif that opened the Symphony. A brief passage by the solo clarinet serves to introduce the lyrical second theme. It soon develops into a soaring melody that will reach its full outpouring in the slow third movement. The development begins softly with a passage for solo violin, but soon becomes tempestuous. The recapitulation offers varied presentations of the principal thematic material. The opening movement finally concludes with a short, but vigorous coda.

II. Allegro molto—The scherzo opens with a lively violin accompaniment figure and the horns’ bold proclamation of the robust main theme. The violins respond with their own version of the theme. This principal section of the scherzo alternates with contrasting episodes of varying moods. After a final reprise of the central portion of the scherzo, the movement ends in mysterious fashion, with the brass’s chorale transformation of the Symphony’s opening motif, leading to a diminuendo, and the hushed closing measures.
III. Adagio—The Adagio is based upon two melodies that are presented at the outset of the movement. The first, played by the violins, is one of Rachmaninov’s most beloved and unforgettable inspirations. A solo clarinet introduces the second melody, marked espressivo e cantabile. The Adagio is a flowing and expansive rhapsody on these two beautiful melodies. Each melody is presented in various forms and instrumental guises, sometimes in combination with the other.

IV. Allegro vivace—The final movement begins with a whirlwind triplet-based figure. A short march episode suddenly appears, but the frenetic opening music soon returns. A brief fanfare introduces another glorious, flowing string melody. A six-measure interlude recalls the Adagio, but is quickly interrupted by the triplet rhythm. More echoes of preceding movements appear, notably the chorale figure that first appeared at the conclusion of the scherzo. The finale’s principal themes return. In the grand climax, a voluptuous statement of the flowing string melody is now coupled with the central triplet rhythm and the scherzo’s chorale figure. The finale’s opening music returns for the work’s exuberant conclusion.