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IT'S SPRING - CELEBRATE!
FRIDAY – APRIL 17, 2009 – 8:00pm
PARAMOUNT THEATRE, OAKLAND

Michael Morgan, Music Director & Conductor
Bryan Nies, Assistant Conductor
with
Sara Buechner, piano

PROGRAM

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)
Russian Easter Overture, Opus 36

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
Petrouchka (1947 version)
Scene I. The Shrove-Tide Fair
Scene II. In Petrouchka's Cell
Scene III. In the Blackamoor's Cell
Scene IV. The Shrove-Tide Fair

INTERMISSION

Mark Lanz Weiser (b.1968)
Four Scenes from The Story of Toccata & Fugue
I. Moons
II. Body
III. Passacaglia
IV. Taxi Ride

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Opus 15
I. Allegro con brio
II. Largo
III. Rondo: Allegro scherzando

with Sara Buechner, piano

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Thank you to the 2008-09 Official Tea of the Oakland East Bay Symphony, NUMI

And the Official Caterer, DEVOTED CATERING by Amiee Alan
Sara Davis Buechner is a classical concert pianist of noteworthy accomplishment, virtuosic mastery, artistic sensitivity and extraordinary versatility. A major prizewinner of many of the world's most prestigious international piano competitions -- Reine Elisabeth of Belgium, Leeds, Salzburg, Sydney and Vienna -- she established her career by winning the Gold Medal of the 1984 Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Bronze Medal of the 1986 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow.

With an active repertoire of over 100 piano concertos, she has appeared as soloist with North America's most prominent orchestras: the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Saint Louis and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras; the Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton and Calgary Symphony Orchestras; and abroad with the Japan Philharmonic, City of Birmingham (U.K.) Symphony Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, Kuopio (Finland) Philharmonic, Slovak Philharmonic, and the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León (Spain). She was a featured artist at the "Piano 2000" Gala Concerts in the Kennedy Center with the National Symphony, and has performed solo recitals at Lincoln Center's "Mostly Mozart" Festival. In addition to her frequent North American concert appearances and radio broadcasts, she tours widely throughout the Far East on a yearly basis.

Ms. Buechner's recording of piano music by George Gershwin was selected as Recording of the Month by Stereophile magazine; her 1997 recording of the Busoni version of Bach's "Goldberg" Variations was profiled in the Arts & Leisure section of the New York Times; and her recording of Hollywood piano concertos by Bernard Herrmann and Franz Waxman won Germany's Deutsches Schauplatten Preis for best soundtrack. Pro Piano has released her CD of the complete piano music of Stephen Foster, and her fourth recording for Koch International was recently released featuring piano music by Rudolf Friml. Ongoing projects for Koch include a multi-volume Bach-Busoni retrospective and piano music of Dana Suesse. Ms. Buechner's extensive discography also includes more than ten disks for the Yamaha Disklavier and Piano Soft systems.

Composer, Mark Lanz Weiser has been described by Joe McLellan of the Washington Post, as a "brilliantly expressive composer on the threshold of what promises to be a spectacular career." Weiser’s music has been performed internationally, and by such groups as the Baltimore and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestras, the Eclipse Chamber Orchestra, the Capitol Quartet, the Peabody Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony, and the New Horizons Chamber Ensemble. He has received commissions from the American Guild of Organists, Bank of America, and the Lehigh Valley Chamber orchestra, among others, and his music is published by Boosey & Hawkes. He has received many awards including annual ASCAP grants since 1996, and residencies at the Yaddo colony in New York and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. His opera Where Angels Fear to Tread was cited in the 1999 annual edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica as a notable American Opera premiere. Weiser’s music can also be heard in many award-winning commercial and independent films that have been shown throughout the US, UK, and Canada.

Mark Lanz Weiser received his Bachelors degree in piano performance and Masters degree in Composition from the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University. He has been on the music faculty of many schools and Universities including the Peabody Conservatory, and is currently faculty in music theory and composition at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music.
PROGRAM NOTES

**Russian Easter Overture, Opus 36**
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)
The first music published in Russia was the *Obikhod*, a 1772 collection of canticles used in the Orthodox Church. Rimsky-Korsakov employed various liturgical themes from this collection in his *Russian Easter Overture*, which was introduced at the Russian Symphony Concerts on December 15, 1888.

“In order to appreciate my Overture even ever so slightly,” he said, “it is necessary that the hearer should have attended Easter morning service at least once...in a cathedral thronged with people from every walk of life with several priests conducting the cathedral service.” The composer was wrong: even godless heathens are powerfully moved by this music.

Rimsky-Korsakov even admitted that the work “combined reminiscences of the ancient prophecy, of the gospel narrative and also a general picture of the Easter service with its ‘pagan merry-making.’ The capering and leaping of the biblical King David before the Ark, do they not give expression to a mood of the idol-worshipers' dance? Surely the Russian Orthodox *Obikhod* is instrumental dance music of the church, is it not? And do not the waving beards of the priests and sextons clad in white vestments and surplices...transport the imagination to pagan times?...This legendary and heathen side of the holiday, this transition from the gloomy and mysterious evening of Passion Saturday to the unbridled pagan-religious merry-making on the morn of Easter Sunday, is what I was eager to reproduce in my Overture.”

He asked Count Golyenishcheff-Kootoozoff to write a programmatic poem on the Overture. Dissatisfied with the result, he prefaced the score with quotations from Psalm 68 and St. Mark's Gospel.

The composer then provided his own description of the work: “The rather lengthy, slow introduction on the theme of ’Let God Arise!’ alternating with the ecclesiastical theme ’An angel wailed,’ appeared to me, in its beginning, as it were, the ancient Isaiah's prophecy concerning the resurrection of Christ. The gloomy colors of the *Andante lugubre* seemed to depict the holy sepulcher that had shone with ineffable light at the moment of the resurrection, in the transition to the *Allegro* of the Overture. The beginning of the *Allegro*, ’Let them also that hate Him flee before Him,’ led to the holiday mood of the Greek Orthodox church service on Christ's matins; the solemn trumpet voice of the joyous, almost dance-like bell-tolling, alternating now with the sexton's rapid reading and now with the conventional chant of the priest's reading the glad tidings of the Evangelist. The *Obikhod* theme, ’Christ is arisen,’ which forms a sort of subsidiary part of the Overture, appeared amid the trumpet-blasts and bell-tolling, constituting also a triumphant *coda*.”

**Petrouchka (1947 version)**
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
After the success of *The Firebird* in 1910, Stravinsky and Serge Diaghilev, the director of the Russian Ballet, were planning a new ballet, a project that would emerge three years later as *The Rite of Spring*. In the meantime, during August of 1910, Stravinsky recalled, “I wanted to refresh myself by composing an orchestral piece in which the piano would play the most important part--a sort of ’Konzertstück.’ In composing the music, I had in mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggios. The orchestra in turn retaliates with menacing trumpet blasts. The outcome is a terrific noise which reaches its climax and ends in the sorrowful and querulous collapse of the poor puppet. Having finished this bizarre piece, I struggled for hours, while walking beside Lake Geneva, to find a title which would express in a word the character of my music and, consequently, the personality of this creature.”

“One day I leapt for joy,” he continued, “I had indeed found my title-- *Petrouchka*, the immortal and unhappy
hero of every fair in all countries. Soon afterwards Diaghilev came to visit me at Clarens, where I was staying. He was much astonished when, instead of sketches for The Rite of Spring, I played him the piece I had composed, and which later became the second scene of Petrouchka. He was so much pleased with it that he could not leave it alone, and began persuading me to develop the theme of the puppet's sufferings and make it into a whole ballet.”

The production was designed by Alexandre Benois, who wrote of their collaboration: “We were staying at the same hotel in Rome for nearly a month, and every morning I used to hear from my room a confused tangle of sounds, interrupted from time to time by long pauses.” Stravinsky finished the music on May 26, 1911.

Petrouchka was introduced on June 13, 1911 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. Pierre Monteux conducted. The choreographer was Michel Fokine. The cast included Tamara Karsavina as the Ballerina, Alexander Orlov as the Blackamoor, and Enrico Cecchetti as the Showman. Vaclav Nijinsky's performance in the title role was so electrifying that Sarah Bernhardt is supposed to have said, “I'm afraid, I'm afraid--because I have just seen the greatest actor in the world.”

Subtitled “Burlesque in four scenes,” Petrouchka is set in Admiralty Square in St. Petersburg during Shrove-Tide Fair in the 1830s. Crowds of people jostle, as rival dancers and entertainers compete for attention. Drum-rolls introduce the Showman, who reveals three puppets: Petrouchka, the Ballerina and the Blackamoor. He charms them to life with his flute and they dance, first in the little puppet theater and then out in the open. Their “Russian Dance” ends the first scene.

The second scene, “Petrouchka 's Cell,” introduces the famous “Petrouchka chord,” a combination of C major and F sharp major, representing the two conflicting parts of Petrouchka's character--the puppet and the human. Petrouchka awkwardly professes his love for the Ballerina, but she flees.

In the third scene, “The Blackamoor's Cell,” the Blackamoor is playing with a coconut, when the Ballerina enters and the two dance to a waltz based on tunes by the Viennese composer Josef Lanner. In a jealous rage, Petrouchka interrupts, but is kicked out by the Blackamoor.

The final scene returns to the Shrove-Tide Fair, where wet-nurses, a bear, gypsies, coachman and masqueraders--dressed as a devil, a goat and a pig--all have dances. Suddenly, Petrouchka rushes out, pursued by the Blackamoor, who slays Petrouchka with his scimitar. The Showman assures the crowd that, after all, Petrouchka is only a puppet, with a wooden head and body stuffed with sawdust. The crowd disperses, and the Showman drags the puppet off the stage, as Petrouchka's ghost hovers above, gesturing. The ghost, according to Stravinsky, “is the real Petrouchka, and his appearance at the end makes the Petrouchka of the preceding play a mere doll. His gesture is not one of triumph or protest, as is so often said, but a nose-thumbing addressed to the audience.”

In 1947 Stravinsky revised Petrouchka for a smaller orchestra.

**Four Scenes from The Story of Toccata & Fugue**
**Mark Lanz Weiser (b.1968)**

These four scenes for String Orchestra are excerpted from the score to Neal Thibedeau’s film, The Story of Toccata & Fugue starring Graham Sibley and Annika Marks portraying the characters Gil Toccata and Andi Fugue. Titled, “Moons,” “Body,” “Passacaglia,” and “Taxi Ride,” they continue one to the next without pause.

“Though each scene is a cue from the film,” Weiser says, “I don’t think it would be necessary to describe what’s happening in the movie when they are being played--hopefully they can just stand on their own as abstracts.
Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Opus 15
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven's First Piano Concerto was actually written after his Second. It was published first, though, and duly dedicated to the Princess Odescalchi, a former pupil. It is possible that the work was introduced on December 18, 1795 at Beethoven's second public appearance in Vienna as composer and pianist. The concert was organized by his teacher, Franz Josef Haydn, and included three of Haydn's *London* symphonies.

Beethoven played the work in Prague in 1798, along with movements from one of his early piano sonatas. He also improvised on a theme supplied by a local countess. The composer Johann Wenzel Tomaschek, who was present, reported: “Beethoven's magnificent playing and particularly the daring flights in his improvisation stirred me strangely to the depths of my soul; indeed I found myself so profoundly bowed down that I did not touch my piano for several days.”

Still another early performance took place in Vienna on April 2, 1800. It was Beethoven's first concert for his own benefit and included a Mozart symphony, excerpts from Haydn's *The Creation*, and Beethoven's Septet and First Symphony. One critic noted that the Concerto “contains many beautiful things, especially the first two movements.” Apparently the orchestra played badly, for the review complained that “the shortcomings of this orchestra...were therefore even more evident, especially since Beethoven's compositions are hard to play. In the accompaniments they did not take the trouble to consider the soloist. Of delicacy in accompanying, of following the sequence of the feelings of the solo player and so forth, not the slightest trace. What significant effect can even the most excellent composition achieve?”

Much has been made of Beethoven's debt to Mozart in the C major Concerto. Alfred Einstein, the editor of the third edition of the Köchel catalog of Mozart's works, writes: “Beethoven perhaps juxtaposed the two forces more dramatically, and he pursued an ideal of virtuosity different from Mozart's; but at bottom he developed only one type among Mozart's concertos, which we may call for the present the 'military' or 'martial' type.”

In his biography of Beethoven, John N. Burk comments: “The orchestra is not yet liberated, but it is perceptibly finding itself. The Concerto is forward- as well as backward- looking, tapping at the door of happy discoveries to come and even bringing to pass through the fulfillment of formal expectations the spell of the poet Beethoven.”

~ Program Notes by Charley Samson, copyright 2009.