



TOUR  
MARCH, 3 & 4, 2023

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Poème, Op. 25

ERNEST CHAUSSON (1855 - 1899)

The salons of late nineteenth-century Paris resounded with the music of Massenet and d'Indy, the poetry of Baudelaire and Verlaine, and the painting of Manet and Whistler. In the middle of this sensational scene was a young composer named Ernest Chausson (1855-1899). Before his untimely death at the age of forty-four, Chausson would produce a number of vibrant and strikingly original works.

For his *Poème for Violin and Orchestra*, Op. 25 (1896), he found inspiration both in the temperate climate of Florence, where he spent the spring and summer of 1896, and in Ivan S. Turgenev's short story "The Song of Triumphant Love." Turgenev's story tells the tale of an Italian nobleman who

determines to win back the woman he loved, the wife of his best friend, with the aid of dark arts acquired during extensive world travels. In the story's climactic scene, he bewitches his former lover by playing, on an "Indian violin," a "passionate melody (that) poured forth from beneath the broadly-handled bow,—poured forth with beautiful undulations, like the snake which had covered the top of the violin with its skin; with so much fire, and with so much triumphant joy."

Composed as a single movement with a substantial cadenza (an unaccompanied virtuosic passage for the soloist) near the beginning of the work, the *Poème* was written for the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931). Chausson was fascinated by the harmonic innovations of his older contemporary Richard Wagner - while Wagner's influence on Chausson's language is undeniable, his music is also quintessentially French in its coloristic approach. The *Poème*, like Turgenev's short story, is a concise masterpiece of vibrant expression.

— ***Bryn Digney***

# Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op. 33

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSY (1840 - 1893)

This work for cello and orchestra was composed by Tchaikovsky for his colleague, Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, cellist and fellow professor at Moscow University. Fitzenhagen premiered the piece in 1877.

The original form of the work is a theme followed by eight variations in a classical, Rococo style. Fitzenhagen was deeply involved in the work's composition during 1876. Following the premiere, he popularized the work using his own heavily edited version (Fitzenhagen's has seven, not eight variations, and in different order, among numerous other changes, both structural and subtle). Tchaikovsky reportedly was frustrated by Fitzenhagen's audacity in making such revisions, but did not prevent him from publishing the alternative version, which remains the most popular today.

— *S. McDougall Graham*

# Violin Concerto No. 1

VIVIAN FUNG (1975)

My Violin Concerto brings together my influence by non-Western traditional music, especially Balinese gamelan music, and my friendship with violinist Kristin Lee. The initial idea for the work began during rehearsals for the premiere of my Piano Concerto in 2009, in which Kristin was the concertmaster of Metropolis Ensemble. Ever so enthusiastic, she suggested how it would be wonderful for me to write a concerto for her. Fast forward a year, and the concerto commission falls into place through the generosity of the DeRosa family.

I started to think seriously about the concerto in the summer of 2010 at the same time as I was preparing for a tour of Bali with the Balinese gamelan with which I have performed for the past three years. The gamelan sonorities ringing through my head were a natural inspiration for me, but just as meaningful was Kristin's desire to come with me for part of the Bali tour. She wanted to witness first-hand the sounds that have moved me, and wanted to understand where my

ideas came from. Upon my return to my home in New York, I started writing in July and finished by October. The concerto draws on the sights, sounds, and memories of Bali that have remained in my heart from the tour, as well as my getting to know Kristin, her firebrand style of playing, and, complementing that, the intense lyricism that she expresses as well.

The work is in one continuous movement with several sections. It starts off high and soft, with bird-like whistles in the strings and eventually culminates in an increasingly driving transition, topped off with a *kebyar*-like phrase in the orchestra. The first fast section begins with odd-meters and jaunting rhythms in the solo part. A “ghostly” slow section follows, featuring eerie harmonic string writing, and eventually the music accelerates into a second fast section with the solo violin displaying virtuosic *moto perpetuo* passages. At the climax of this section, an involved cadenza grows toward one of the highest pitches on the violin with the instruction, “play like a rock star.” In the penultimate section of the concerto, the soloist is repeatedly interrupted by the orchestra while quoting from a Javanese folksong called *Puspawarna*. Eventually, the full texture of this melodic

section subsides and the concerto ends as it began, with birdlike whistles fading into ascending glissandi.

– *Vivian Fung*

## **Symphony No. 2**

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833 - 1897)

Brahms spent the summers of 1877 and 1878 in Pörtlach, Austria, a picturesque little town overlooking the Wörthersee in southern Austria. In this idyllic setting, with access to the lake for early morning swims and to the beautiful surrounding mountains for long walks in the countryside, Brahms was clearly inspired and happy. He composed several of his most warm and heartfelt works there, including the Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73, and the Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Major, Op. 78.

Completing his first symphony, Op. 68, had been a torturous, decades-long undertaking for Brahms. Plagued by self criticism and haunted by the expectation that he should continue Beethoven's legacy of symphonic excellence, he finally completed the C Minor Symphony in 1876. Having

gotten over this hurdle, the second symphony came spilling out of him in a matter of months, with the first draft begun in June 1877 and the premiere taking place in Vienna on December 30th of the same year, to rave reviews.

Brahms described his second symphony as sounding “so merry and tender, as though it were especially written for a newly wedded couple.” In addition to the classical scoring of pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets with timpani and strings, the inclusion of three trombones and tuba in the D Major Symphony provides sonic depth and emotional range to the work. The first movement *Allegro non troppo* opens gently and peacefully, like the feeling of opening the curtains and gazing out the window on a sweet summer morning in the countryside. But soon the low brass enter, introducing an element of uncertainty and doubt, which will reappear throughout the piece, especially in the intense and dramatic *Adagio non troppo* which follows. The third movement, *Allegretto grazioso*, (*Quasi Andantino*) employs a sparser, more classical instrumentation in the spirit of a rustic dance for wind band. The final *Allegro con spirito* returns to the more optimistic tone of the opening of the symphony, sneaking in quietly before bursting out in celebratory exuberance.

– *Nell Flanders*