

Program Notes and Bios

Hector Berlioz' Symphonie fantastique

Thursday, April 22, 2010 8 pm

Saturday, April 24, 2010 8 pm

Sunday, April 25, 2010 2:30 pm

Jones Hall

Kirill Karabits, conductor

*Simon Trpceski, piano

Saint-Saëns

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Opus 22

I. Andante sostenuto

II. Allegro scherzando

III. Presto

INTERMISSION

Berlioz

Symphonie fantastique, Opus 14

I. Rêveries - Passions: Largo—Allegro agitato e appassionato assai

II. Un Bal (A Ball): Valse, Allegro non troppo

III. Scène aux Champs (In the Country): Adagio

IV. Marche au Supplice (March to the Scaffold): Allegretto non troppo

V. Songe d'une Nuit du Sabbat (Dream of the Witches' Sabbath): Larghetto—Allegro

*Houston Symphony debut

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2 IN G MINOR, OPUS 22

Camille Saint-Saëns

Born: Oct 9, 1835, Paris, France

Died: Dec 16, 1921, Algiers, Algeria

Work composed: 1868

Recording: Jean Yves Thibaudet, pianist; Charles Dutoit conducting L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (Decca)

Instrumentation: pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets; timpani, percussion and strings

Anton Rubinstein, the great 19th-century Russian pianist, composer, conductor and founder of the Moscow Conservatory, is credited with prompting the composition of one of the most famous concertos of the Romantic era. In April 1868, Rubinstein wrote his longtime friend, Camille Saint-Saëns, asking Saint-Saëns to arrange a concert in Paris where he could make his debut as conductor. The first available date in the Salle Pleyel was three weeks away, whereupon Saint-Saëns quipped: "Very well, I shall write a concerto for the occasion."

And so he did! Where the G minor Concerto was hurriedly set down on paper and rather hurriedly rehearsed and performed (the premiere featuring the composer as soloist on May 13 was greeted with mixed reviews), Saint-Saëns had apparently been planning the concerto in his mind for at least 10 months. Whatever the mix of haste and thoughtfulness, the result was one of the most ostentatious and unusual concertos in the 19th-century repertoire.

Were it not for the sprinkling of a few themes here and there, the first movement might have been classified as a continuous cadenza. It is an imposing slow fantasia that begins with a long, figurative introductory cadenza for the solo piano, not unlike a big, showy Bach organ toccata. A stern, commanding statement from the orchestra opens the movement proper, and the piano returns with two rather Chopinesque themes: a somber, downward-arching G minor theme stated over an elaborate broken-chord left-hand part, and a sentimental second theme in B-flat major (which does not recur at the end of this skeletal sonata-form movement).

Once the two themes have been set forth, the piano begins a whole series of roulades, finger-tripping double-note passages, roaring octave runs and broken-chord figures that finally dissolve the center of the movement into another cadenza. Elements of the main G minor theme barely have time to intervene before the pianist interrupts with a reprise of its opening toccata music, which the orchestra finally closes off with a firm restatement of its opening passage.

The somber mood abruptly gives way to a spirit of gaiety with the opening of the Scherzo. A timpani solo, perhaps reminiscent of those in the Scherzo of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, sets the rhythm soon taken up by the piano. Its brilliant theme lightly gallops up and down the keyboard with rapid chords and running-note figures. A rushing passage of scales and arpeggios brings a slight change of gait in the Trio section, which transforms the music into a giddy waltz. So it proceeds back and forth to the end of the movement. The tarantella which forms the closing rondo movement takes up an even more challenging pace, with a comparably thrilling display of virtuosity.

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE, OPUS 14

Hector Berlioz

Born: Dec 11, 1803, La Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France

Died: Mar 8, 1869, Paris, France

Work composed:

Recording: Michael Tilson Thomas conducting the San Francisco Symphony (RCA Victor Red Seal)

Instrumentation: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets (second doubling E-flat clarinet), four bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two tubas, timpani (two performers), bass drum, percussion, two harps and strings

Hector Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique* resulted from the composer's fateful attraction to the Irish actress, Harriet Smithson, who portrayed Ophelia and Juliet in the first Parisian performances of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1827. Ideas apparently fermented in his mind over

the next two and one-half years, while other works were being composed. But in February 1830, he acknowledged in a letter to Humbert Ferrand that ideas for the symphony had taken shape, and on April 16, he wrote to Ferrand that he had just written the final note to the autobiographical five-movement symphony, which he subtitled "Episode in the Life of an Artist."

His second letter also contained the first of three drafts of the celebrated "program" describing (1) the "reveries and passions" he held for this woman, represented musically as an "idée fixe" (a musical theme that recurs throughout the symphony), (2) meeting her at a ball, (3) seeing and calling to her in a meadow, but receiving no reply, (4) dreaming he is being led to the scaffold and (5) imagining he has been cast into hell amid a maelstrom of demons and witches. Although Berlioz' narrative pamphlet was later withdrawn, the symphony joined Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony in fostering a resurgence of descriptive program music throughout the 19th century.

Harriet Smithson was the catalyst of this wild symphonic essay (she finally consented to what became an unhappy marriage with Berlioz after hearing the symphony two years later), but other, earlier sources of inspiration provided important musical ingredients to the work. The languid, yearning violin melody in the introduction to the symphony was borrowed from a youthful song Berlioz had written after an earlier, adolescent infatuation with a girl named Estelle. The soaring "idée fixe," that forms the main theme of the first movement, was borrowed from a cantata, "Herminie," which the fledgling composer had written in 1828, in an effort to win the Prix de Rome. The fourth-movement March to the Scaffold was evidently a revision of a March of the Guards from Berlioz' uncompleted opera, *Les francs-juges*, which he had worked on between 1826 and 1829.

Musically, the symphony blends its wild tale with very progressive orchestral tendencies and very French concepts of melody and tone color. The long, lyrical melodic lines in the introduction and the main themes of the first three movements typify the song-like character of French melody. Bright, shimmering colors prevail in the orchestration – again a French trait -- but the use of two harps in the second movement and orchestral chimes in the chilling fifth-movement, *Witches Sabbath*, is nearly unprecedented in a symphony, as is the use of snare drums in the fatalistic March to the Scaffold. Berlioz also made special coloristic use of other unusual instruments: the English horn in the pastoral third-movement Scene in the Fields and the shrill E-flat clarinet in a mocking, distorted statement of the "idée fixe" toward the beginning of the *Witches Sabbath*. The double-basses are often given separate bass lines from the cellos, again a trend mainly traceable only as far back as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Berlioz' inclusion of ophicleides (tubas in modern performances) is another innovative reinforcement of the lowest bass register in a symphonic ensemble.

Along with its lavish orchestral dress and its wild emotional tendencies, the *Symphonie fantastique* makes novel use of traditional, well-knit Viennese symphonic forms. Following the introduction, the first movement is a tightly composed sonata movement, obsessed so single-mindedly on the "idée fixe" theme of the elusive woman that other thematic ideas are mainly variants of it. The theme returns tantalizingly at the very end of the first-movement coda and forms the entire Trio section of the billowing second-movement Waltz.

The third and fourth movements are both large three-part forms (ABA), each with an introduction and postlude. The "idée fixe" floats in and out of the idyllic music of the third-movement Scene in the Fields whose pastoral setting is flavored with a Swiss cowherd's song, echoing between the English horn and oboe at the beginning, plus some rumbling-thunder timpani rolls as the only answer when the English horn sounds the call at the end. The fourth-movement March to the Scaffold seems to be constantly repeating its ominous theme, but Berlioz achieved

variety by bringing each of its statements to a different conclusion. Again, the “*idée fixe*” appears in the clarinet just before the blade of the guillotine is loosed upon the artist’s neck.

The closing diabolical Witches Sabbath is the most remarkable of the five movements, blending a parody of the “*idée fixe*,” a witches round dance and the doom-laden “*Dies Irae*” plainchant from the Latin Mass of the Dead, replete with tolling chimes. All of this is fused into a well-organized sonata movement involving some fairly rigorous contrapuntal procedures, but one that expresses a wild, emotionally willful character consistent with the scene described in Berlioz’ program. More than any other movement, it demonstrates that Berlioz was as much a virtuoso composer for the orchestra as Chopin and Liszt were virtuoso composers for the piano.

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A Decade of Change

The decade from 1822 to 1832 encompassed the composition of four extraordinary symphonies: Schubert’s *Unfinished* (1822) and C major symphonies (1825-28), Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (1824) and Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique* (1830).

While the two Schubert symphonies remained unperformed and unknown for many years, the Beethoven and Berlioz symphonies soon shook the established foundations of the medium. Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony was echoed at the end of the century by the monumental late symphonies of Bruckner and by the huge choral-orchestral symphonies of Mahler. Berlioz’ descriptive *Symphonie fantastique* led to the descriptive “program” symphonies and tone poems of Liszt, Joachim Raff and Richard Strauss.

Considered from another perspective, the Beethoven and Schubert ninth symphonies could be considered as great musical documents, proclaiming universal ideals at the very end of the Classical era, while Schubert’s *Unfinished* Symphony and Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique* were intensely personal statements, focusing upon the lonely, alienated artist at the beginning of the Romantic era.

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Musician Biographies

Kirill Karabits, conductor

“Karabits, a charmer, has that rare ability to be both fastidious and thrilling... This evening has made Karabits something of a star. More to the point, it confirms what a fine conductor he is.”

— Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*, August 2009

In making his BBC Proms debut with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in August 2009, Kirill Karabits effectively launched his four year tenure as Principal Conductor of the orchestra. The BBC selected their broadcast of Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 11 to be the cover CD of the September edition of BBC Music Magazine, and their next disc will be a recording of music by Rodion Shchedrin released by Naxos in 2010.

In much demand as a guest conductor, future engagements include a return to the Philharmonia in May 2010 and an appearance at the Bath Mozartfest with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in November 2010. Next summer he will also conduct the Britten-Pears Orchestra as part of the Snape Proms at Aldeburgh. Other highlights include concerts with the

SWR-Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Sinfonieorchester Basel and Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. He will make his debut with Bamberger Symphoniker at the Kissinger Sommer Festival with Vadim Repin in June 2010.

Karabits made his North American debut with Houston Symphony in March 2009, followed by appearances in July 2009 with Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, and at the Grant Park and Aspen Festivals. Future appearances in the United States include concerts with the Minnesota Orchestra, and the San Francisco and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestras. He also returns to Japan in autumn 2010 to make his debut with Tokyo Symphony Orchestra.

Equally established as an opera conductor, Karabits' productions in the 2008/09 season included *Un Ballo in Maschera* with Opéra National du Rhin, a return to Opéra National de Lorraine to conduct *Idomeneo*, and a production of *Pique Dame* with Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg. This season he will make his Opéra National de Lyon debut with Shostakovich's *Mosvka Cheryomushki* in December 2009, followed by a semi-staged performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mozart and Salieri* in May 2010. He will make his debut with English National Opera in autumn 2010. Previous operatic engagements have included debuts with Grand Théâtre Genève (Janacek's *The Adventures of Mr Broucek*) and Glyndebourne Festival Opera (*Eugene Onegin*).

As part of his ongoing doctoral studies in Vienna, Kirill Karabits has done a considerable amount of research into hitherto unperformed or forgotten works that make up part of the recently rediscovered archive of Berliner Singakademie. This included his transcription of C.P.E. Bach's Johannes Passion, written in Hamburg in 1784 and previously considered lost. His research has also led to the modern premiere of Telemann's unknown (and probably earliest existing opera) *Pastorelle en Musique*, which he recorded for Capriccio.

Kirill Karabits studied conducting and composition at the Lysenko Music School in Kiev before continuing his studies at the National Tchaikovsky Music Academy in Kiev with Roman Kofman, and at the Vienna Hochschule für Musik under Uroš Lajovic. He has also held the positions of Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and Associate Conductor of both Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

Simon Trp eski, piano

Macedonian pianist Simon Trp eski has established himself as one of the industry's most remarkable young musicians, delighting audiences worldwide. These concerts mark his debut with the Houston Symphony.

Trp eski has performed extensively with the leading orchestras of the United Kingdom. European engagements have included the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Russian National Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra. In North America, he performs regularly with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra and Chicago Symphony, among others. He has performed throughout Asia and Australia and has toured with the New Zealand Symphony.

This season, he debuts with the Cleveland Orchestra at the Blossom Music Festival, at the Verbier Festival and Chorégies d'Orange and returns to the Aspen Music Festival. He begins a Rachmaninoff piano concerto cycle with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, and continues the same with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

A superb recitalist, Trp eski has given solo performances in leading venues around the world. He performed at the United Nations headquarters on the occasion of the closing of the 66nd session of the U.N. General Assembly.

He has received much praise for his EMI recital recordings. The first, featuring works by Tchaikovsky, Scriabin, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, received both the Editor's Choice and Debut Album Awards at the Gramophone Awards; an all-Rachmaninoff disc and an all-Chopin disc were equally applauded. In 2008, he released a critically-acclaimed all-Debussy disc.

Born in the Republic of Macedonia in 1979, Simon Trp eski has won prizes in international piano competitions in the U.K., Italy and the Czech Republic. From 2001 to 2003, he was a member of the BBC New Generation Scheme, and in 2003, he was awarded the Young Artist Award by the Royal Philharmonic Society. A graduate of the University of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Skopje, Trp eski currently teaches at his alma mater.