**Beethoven's Violin Concerto**

**Wednesday, November 8 – 7:30 pm**

**Alexander Prior**, conductor
**Andrew Wan**, violin

**GLINKA**
***A Life for the Tsar*: Overture** (9')*

**SCHUBERT / BERIO**
***Rendering*** (33')*
Allegro
II
III

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

**BEETHOVEN**
***Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.61*** (45')*
Allegro ma non troppo
Larghetto
Rondo

program subject to change
*indicates approximate performance duration

***A Life for the Tsar*** (Ivan Sussanin): **Overture**
**Mikhail Glinka**
(b. Novospasskoe, Smolensk, 1804 / d. Berlin, 1857)

Opera first performed: November 27, 1836 in St Petersburg
Last ESO performance of the overture: October 1995

Mikhail Glinka is a composer whose place in music is secured not through the popularity of his works, but in the place he holds historically. Before Glinka, Russia had no real tradition of any sort in formal music. It had hundreds of folk idioms scattered across its vast landscape, but Glinka himself travelled abroad for his musical training. He studied piano with Field, violin with Böhm, and taught himself

harmony and orchestration. He originally contemplated a career in the civil service, but he ended up pursuing music. His opera *A Life for the Tsar* (originally named for its main character, Ivan Sussanin) was his first major work, and shortly after its production, he became choral director of the Tsar's Imperial Chapel in St. Petersburg.

The reason Glinka is so important to musical legacy is that, not only was he making his mark in a world dominated by western Europeans, but he went one step further by becoming Russia's first nationalist composer. In his memoirs, Glinka recalls that his extensive travels in Europe made him long for his own land. "Homesickness led me little by little to write Russian music," he wrote. To a friend, he said, "My most earnest desire is to compose music which will make all my beloved fellow countrymen feel quite at home, and lead no one to allege that I strut about in borrowed plumes." That phrase is actually not a bad way of defining the nationalist movement in music of the late 19th century. After Glinka, the Russian composers all carried on his inspiration to a greater or lesser degree. The group which became known as the Russian Five, in fact, came together largely in the spirit of carrying on from where Glinka had left.

*A Life for the Tsar* is a four-act drama with a libretto by Baron de Rosen. Its story takes place in 17th-century Russia, while the Poles are invading Russia. The invaders decide to capture the Tsar, and some of them try to force the patriotic peasant Ivan Sussanin into betraying the Tsar's hiding place. Instead, he sends them off in the wrong direction, then gets word to the Tsar. Ivan is subsequently killed by the Poles for his deception, though not before the Tsar has made good his escape.

Musically, Glinka is often underrated. He is almost unknown on the operatic stage outside Russia, and is known principally for the overture to his second opera, Russlan and Ludmilla. Yet other composers, even non-Russians, thought a great deal of his work. Prosper Mérimée said of *A Life for the Tsar*, "it is more than opera; it is a national epic Poetically, as musically, it is a faithful account of all that Russia has suffered and sung." Even as acerbic a critic as Berlioz said of Glinka, "he can be simple without every condescending to a vulgar phrase. His melodies take unexpected turns and are built on periods which charm by their very strangeness." This so-called "strangeness" of which Berlioz writes is nothing to us now, as we have got to know Russian rhythms and harmonies thanks to all those composers who came after Glinka.

***Rendering***
**Franz Schubert / Luciano Berio**
(Schubert b. Vienna, 1797 / d. Vienna 1828) (Berio b. Oneglia, 1925 / d. Rome, 2003)

First performed: April 1990 in Amsterdam
Last ESO performance: October 2001

When does a work cease to belong to one composer, and where does the contribution of another composer take over? *Rendering* – a re-imagining by Luciano Berio of music written over a century and a

half before by Franz Schubert – is a beautiful rumination on that very question. Luciano Berio turned to the music of past masters a number of times over his career, expanding or exploring facets of music by Bach, Mozart, Purcell, Brahms, and others. *Rendering*, however, stands out. "(*Rendering*) is an extreme case of transcription," wrote his widow, Talia Pecker Berio, "offering, perhaps more than any other work by Berio, a complex, intimate look at his creative relationship with the legacy of history." For its source material, Berio's work uses the sketches of a symphony Schubert never completed – a work in D Major to which has been ascribed the Deutsch number 936a. Using the same orchestration as that of Schubert's more famous "Unfinished" Symphony, Berio does not attempt to "complete" what Schubert left unwritten. Instead, the fragments are left visible, "and in the jargon of the building trade it serves to indicate the filling of spaces between bricks with mortar," in the words of musicologist Giordano Montecchi.

The half-hour work is pretty evenly split among three movements. The Allegro first movement begins with music that reminds us much of the great proto-Romantic Schubert, but it is not long before Berio's 20th-century hand creates a shimmering contemporary veneer as a bridge to the next substantial bit of Schubert. Throughout this majestic treatment of Schubert's music, Berio's own "patches" whirl up like delicate, slightly alien figurations – unsettling, but extremely effective in reaching, musically, across time. The Andante second movement begins with Berio's music, segueing gently into a woodwind-dominated main theme of quiet stateliness. Indeed, there is a majesterial feel to much of the music of the movement. A single pizzicato chord precedes an eerie beginning to the final movement, which is based on music Berio regarded as among Schubert's most contrapuntal designs. The movement is in a loose Rondo form, concluding with a fugue based on the main theme and an ending that manages to capture the spirit of both of its creators.

***Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.61***
**Ludwig van Beethoven**
(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performance: December 23, 1806 in Vienna
Last ESO performance: June 2005

There is little doubt that Beethoven would write a violin concerto at some point in his career. A concerto was begun while he still lived in Bonn (WoO 5), and most scholars agree the two *Romances for Violin*, Opp.40 and 50, were workings-out of potential slow movements. But in the end, the *D Major Concerto* he finally produced came in great haste, scrabbled together in the latter months of 1806 in time for a concert that December 23. Rushing to put finishing touches to it, Beethoven barely had a legible score for the concerto's soloist, the fine Viennese violinist Franz Clement (only 26 but already leader of the orchestra at the Theater an der Wien), in time for the premiere. Clement had to more or less read the score on sight, and it took a while for the concerto to take hold. In fact, it was really not until Joseph Joachim championed the work beginning in 1844 that Beethoven's only concerto for violin was revealed as the masterpiece it is.

The colossal first movement (25 minutes of the concerto's 45-minute duration) contains a surprising economy of thematic ideas, but a wealth of ways in presenting them. For example, the dramatic, and stark, timpani notes which begin the work show up throughout the movement as a linking idea, but also as an accompaniment to the second main theme. That's only one example of the many unusual features of this movement. Listen also for how Beethoven uses trills in the solo violin. At the time, trills were almost always used to end long phrases; here, Beethoven uses them as integral parts of the piece – stretching one out and modulating it to an unexpected F Major. The three main musical ideas are presented many times throughout the movement, but in most cases they are presented quite differently upon each new repetition. This movement is a long, rhythmic, exquisitely crafted first movement, and it had no precedent for its scope prior to it.

It is often said of the beautiful second movement that not a lot actually happens in it (the ever quotable scholar Donald Tovey described it as "sublime inaction"). In reality, it is a beautiful theme with four long variations (with a second theme and its own variation as well). Here, the violin engages in dialog with spare musical forces and muted strings. Without a pause, we are pulled unexpectedly from this movement's F Major into the concerto's home key, and the Rondo finale enters without a pause. This movement is very much in the traditional Beethoven format for concerto finales, and also features perhaps the most virtuosic work for the soloist. It is cast in a favourite metre of Mozart's for final movements: the gentle gallop of 6/8, and brings the work to a lively, happy and triumphant conclusion.