

## **Firebird**

**Friday, February 23 – 7:30 pm**

**Saturday, February 24 – 8 pm**

**Jayce Ogren**, conductor

**Blake Pouloit**, violin

Afterthoughts, Friday post-performance in the Main Lobby with Jayce Ogren & Blake Pouliot

Symphony Prelude, Saturday 7 pm in the Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

### **COPLAND**

***Orchestral Variations***

(13')\*

### **KORNGOLD**

***Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.24***

(25')\*

Moderato mobile

Romanze: Andante

Finale: Allegro assai vivace

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

### **SIBELIUS**

***Kuolema, Op.44: No. 1 – Valse triste***

(6')\*

### **STRAVINSKY**

***L'Oiseau de feu*** ("The Firebird"): **Ballet Suite** (1945 version)

(31')\*

Introduction

Prelude – Dance of the Firebird – Variations

Pantomime I

Pas de deux: Firebird and Ivan Tsarevich

Pantomime II

Scherzo: Dance of the Princesses

Pantomime III

Rondo and Round Dance: The Princesses' Khorovod

Infernal Dance of Prince Kashchei

Berceuse

Finale

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

### ***Orchestral Variations***

**Aaron Copland**

(b. Brooklyn, 1900 / d. New York, 1990)

Original piano version first performed: January 4, 1931 in New York

Orchestral version first performed: 1958 in Louisville, Kentucky

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Aaron Copland's reputation was as a composer. Yet, he was accomplished enough as a pianist to have performed several of his own works (and those of others) in concert. His friend and protégé, Leonard Bernstein (like Copland, himself a pianist as well as conductor and composer), wryly described Copland's pianistic style as an odd combination of "bangy" and delicate.

Copland composed at the piano, and said that nearly all his works were created there. He wrote works for solo piano throughout his career, and in fact, his three major solo piano pieces more or less mark the significant compositional stages through which he went. The first of these was the *Variations*, composed in 1930. It marked the apotheosis of Copland's early, ultra-modern period. Bernstein himself called it, "a synonym for modern music." And indeed, among the modernists of music at the time, the work was regarded as a masterpiece. The public, however, was less enthusiastic. Frustrated at the lack of performances the work received, and as a testament to his own faith in it, Copland orchestrated the piece 26 years later, on a commission from the Louisville Orchestra.

The variations themselves all grow out of a main theme based on a deceptively simple, and somewhat dissonant sequence of four notes: E, C, D-sharp, C-sharp. The piano version lays bare many of the rhythmic, biting elements of the music (Copland's former student Paul Bowles writes that, "the beams and struts are beautifully visible"). By contrast, the *Orchestral Variations* take advantage of the wider timbral palette of the orchestra. "Some of the music's motoric elements transfer less well for orchestra than, say, its more grandiose passages," writes Howard Pollack in *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, "the work as a whole not only strikingly illuminates the original piano version but constitutes an impressive work in its own right."

### ***Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.24***

**Erich Wolfgang Korngold**

(b. Brno, 1897 / d. Hollywood, 1957)

First performed: February 15, 1947 in St. Louis

Last ESO performance: November 2006

From 1920 to 1930, Erich Wolfgang Korngold was the toast of Vienna. He had been a famous child prodigy, and now, as a young man, his career was on the rise. In 1934, producer-director Max Reinhardt invited the young man out to Hollywood, to orchestrate Mendelssohn's music for a film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. So impressed was the Warner Bros. studio that they signed Korngold to a dream contract: three film scores every two years, during which they would fly him back to Vienna so that he could maintain his European career. But in 1938, the rise of the Nazi party led Korngold to sever those ties, and he moved to Los Angeles with his family.

He became one of the most celebrated film composers Hollywood has ever known, winning two Academy Awards (for his scores to *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Anthony Adverse*). As he had done in Vienna, Korngold also kept writing concert works as well. His *Violin Concerto*, dedicated to Gustav Mahler's widow Alma and first performed by Jascha Heifetz, was composed in the summer of 1945.

It begins with a dramatic opening statement, the theme of which is taken from music he scored for the 1937 film *Another Dawn*. The violin states the theme in a solo passage taken up soon after by the orchestra. The contrasting theme is a more gentle one, now in A Major, adapted from music for *Juarez* (1939). The movement proceeds very much in Sonata Allegro design.

The second movement's main theme is from *Anthony Adverse*. It is contrasted by a subject dominated by the solo violin, played against muted orchestral strings. The vigorous final movement opens with a crisp, staccato jig, and features some of the concerto's most challenging virtuoso passages for the soloist. The dominant melody, a happy and boisterous one, is taken from Korngold's score to *The Prince and the Pauper* from 1937.

### ***Kuolema, Op.44: No. 1 – Valse triste***

**Jean Sibelius**

(b. Tavastehus, 1865 / d. Järvenpää, 1957)

First performed: The play, with incidental music by Sibelius, was first performed on December 2, 1903 in Helsinki

Last ESO performance: May 2017

As with other great nationalist composers, Jean Sibelius turned often to the legends and literature of his native land for inspiration. Arvid Järnefelt (brother of composer Armas Järnefelt, and Sibelius' brother-in-law) wrote a play called *Kuolema* ("Death") in 1903. Sibelius wrote incidental music for it. In one scene, the central character Paavali sits near the bedside of his dying mother. She tells him she has had a dream in which she has gone to a grand ball. She falls asleep with this happy thought, her son dozing nearby. Death appears to claim her, but in her semi-conscious state, she mistakes the grim visage for her long-dead husband, and she rises to dance with him.

The music for this scene has become known as the *Valse triste* (“Sad Waltz”), and this tender, yet haunting melody has become one of Sibelius’ best-known works. The strings of the orchestra are joined by only a single flute, a clarinet, two horns, and a harp.

***L’Oiseau de feu*** (“The Firebird”): **Ballet Suite** (1945 version)

**Igor Stravinsky**

(b. Oranienbaum, 1882 / d. New York, 1971)

First performance of the ballet: June 25, 1910 in Paris

First performance of the 1945 suite: October 24, 1945 in New York

Last ESO performance of the 1945 suite: September 2007

*The Firebird* was the first ballet the rising young composer Igor Stravinsky wrote for Sergei Diaghilev’s famous Pairs-based dance company, *Ballets russes*. Based on an ancient Russian folk tale, the story of the ballet centres around two mythical creatures, representing good (the Firebird) and evil (Prince Kashchei).

Handsome young Prince Ivan Tsarevich, holding a feather from the Firebird as a promise of a future favour, has fallen in love with a maid, not knowing she is under the spell of Kashchei. He follows her into Kashchei’s realm, and into his power. About to be turned to stone, he waves the feather, summoning the Firebird. It appears, and reveals to Prince Ivan that smashing a magic egg will destroy the evil Kashchei. He does this, freeing not only his beloved, but all who had fallen under the spell.

Stravinsky’s scintillating score evocatively brings the magic and primal energy of the story to life. *The Infernal Dance* remains one of the most thrilling few minutes in all of ballet, while the monumentally unfolding Finale, in which a gentle yearning theme first heard on solo flute is given more stately garb at each repeat, brings the work to an inspiring close.

Stravinsky fashioned suites from the ballet several times throughout his life after the successful 1910 premiere of the work. He eventually became a U.S. citizen, and the Soviet regime he left behind withheld royalties from any music he wrote prior to 1931. He therefore prepared new versions of many of his old scores in order to be able to realize royalties; his 1945 version of *The Firebird* contains much of the original ballet’s music, re-orchestrated and revised.

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