

Ravel's Concerto in G

Friday, January 26 – 7:30 pm

Saturday, January 27 – 8 pm

José-Luis Gomez, conductor

Angela Cheng, piano

Afterthoughts, Friday post-performance in the Main Lobby with José-Luis Gomez, Allan Gordon Bell & Angela Cheng

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

BELL

Symphonies of Hidden Fire (2003 ESO commission) (24')*

Fury

Radiance

Rapture

RAVEL

Piano Concerto in G Major (23')*

Allegramente

Adagio assai

Presto

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

LIADOV

The Enchanted Lake, Op.62 (8')*

BORODIN

Symphony No. 2 in B minor (28')*

Allegro

Prestissimo

Andante

Allegro

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Symphonies of Hidden Fire (2003 ESO commission)

Allan Gordon Bell

(b. Calgary, 1953)

First performed: The ESO gave the world premiere performance of the work on November 5, 2004.

Last ESO performance: April 2005 in Ottawa

Allan Gordon Bell received a Master of Music degree from the University of Alberta where he studied with Violet Archer, Malcolm Forsyth, and Manus Sasonkin. He also did advanced studies in composition at the Banff Centre for the Arts. He is Professor of Music at the University of Calgary.

Program Note by the composer:

This piece is a “sounding together” of my musical responses to four poems. The first, an excerpt from the work of the 19th-century Persian poet Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, provides the piece with its title and the short phrase that opens each movement:

Freely in hidden fire
my heart burned
Eloquent with silent flames my heart
burned

The first movement is fast and savage. With its brass and percussion themes, the movement is a relentless outburst. It is a response to an excerpt from Federico García Lorca’s *The Song of the Rider*:

In the black moon
a shriek - and the long
horn of the bonfire

The second movement is as delicate as the serene light found in a child’s smile, a touch of frost, a kind word, an alpine flower or a lover’s caress. It draws its sentiment from a haiku by Basho:

The temple bell stops -
but the sound keeps coming
out of the flowers

The third movement draws its character from two sources. The first is from *The Shaman’s Song* attributed to Uvanuk, a 19th-century Inuit woman:

The great sea
frees me, moves me,
as a strong river carries a weed.
Earth and her strong winds
move me, take me away,
and my soul is swept up in joy.

The movement draws its shape and sensibility from something a colleague once said to me: “In the face of all the sorrow and joy that life hands us, we dance.” I am certain that he was quoting someone, but he does not remember and I have never been able to find the source.

The work was commissioned by the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra with the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and it is dedicated to the dance artist Davida Monk.

Piano Concerto in G Major

Maurice Ravel

(b. Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, 1875 / d. Paris, 1937)

First performed: January 14, 1932 in Paris

Last ESO performance: March 2012

Most of Ravel's great orchestral works began life as works for solo piano. He also wrote many piano works that were not orchestrated. Given this, it is perhaps a little surprising that he got around to writing concertos combining piano and orchestra only twice – and both came within a short span of time. The first was the *Concerto for the Left Hand*, written for Paul Wittgenstein (brother of the famous philosopher), who lost his right arm in World War One. Not surprisingly, it is a serious, probing, and intense work. The *Concerto in G Major*, by contrast, is full of life, rhythm, and the strong influence of that French craze of the 1920s – American jazz.

There is a swaggering feel right from the outset, with pulsing rhythms quietened only by the piano's entry. Comparisons to the feel and essence of one of the first "jazz concertos" – Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* – are easy to make. The piano continues to carry the weight of the thematic presentation throughout the first movement. The famous, six-note rising and falling figure is heard from different instruments at different times, as Ravel strings together several hurdles for the soloist, one following after the other with clever seamlessness.

The Adagio assai second movement is perhaps one of Ravel's most beautiful creations. The piano enters, thoughtfully, romantically, and is in constant play through the course of the movement. A solo flute, and later, a solo oboe have their own, detailed lines of unbroken melody to present, but it is the piano which remains at the centre. A long-held tremolo in the piano heralds the movement's quiet end.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the vigour and pounce of the opening bars of the finale. Quick flashes, slides from some of the winds, and the rapid-fire piano take us in a whirlwind from one flitting idea to the next. The notion of a chase has been attached to the movement more than once. Rather than chords, the piano glitters with single notes, though at a dizzying pace and quantity. Toward the end of the movement there are, finally, chords - jazz-based in their harmonies. Instruments throughout the orchestra get little shouts of their own, and in fact it is the bass drum which gets the last note to play, bringing the work to a good-natured finish.

The Enchanted Lake, Op.62

Anatol Liadov

(b. St. Petersburg, 1855 / d. Novgorod, 1914)

First performed: February 1909 in St. Petersburg

Last ESO performance: 1977

Anatol Liadov is perhaps too well known for the music he didn't write – he turned down Sergei Diaghilev's offer to compose a ballet score that eventually made a star of Igor Stravinsky – *The Firebird*. Because that story eclipses a small but important catalog of works by one of Rimsky-Korsakov's most gifted students. *The Enchanted Lake* is by far Liadov's most famous piece, and does well to represent his outlook on composing as a whole.

"Give me fairies and dragons, mermaids and goblins and I'm thoroughly happy," he once wrote, and indeed, he cared little about exposing his personal feelings or philosophies in his music. He was an intensely private man; though he befriended his former teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov said that despite knowing Liadov for his whole life, he never once met the man's wife.

The Enchanted Lake is a few minutes of shimmering pastels, owing more perhaps to the ethereal sound worlds of Debussy than Liadov's contemporaries Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. The composer himself termed it a "fairytale picture," and while there are brief moments where restless musical passages cause some ripples and eddies on the lake's surface, the net effect of the piece is one of mists, portentous stillness, and wonder.

Symphony No. 2 in B minor

Alexander Borodin

(b. St. Petersburg, 1833 / d. St. Petersburg, 1887)

First performed: March 10, 1877 in St. Petersburg

Last ESO performance: 1975

For Alexander Borodin, composition was a part-time thing. He was a chemist, and an adjunct professor of chemistry in St. Petersburg. That explains both his limited number of compositions, as well as the length of time it took some of his works to reach fruition – if they did at all.

His Symphony in B minor, for example, was begun in 1869, and took him about seven years all told. Then, following its tepid reception at its first performance, he revised the work in 1879 (this newer version, with thinned-out brass parts and other revisions, premiered on March 4, 1879). It is one of the few substantial works for orchestra he completed during his life, and it has become one of the best examples of a symphony composed by any member of that group of Russian nationalist composers known as the Mighty Five.

Borodin alternated the writing of this work with composing his opera Prince Igor, as well as his teaching and scientific duties. There was also a joint production of a four-act opera-ballet based on the Russian tale of Mlada – Borodin was asked to contribute music. But the project's scope was too large and it fell through; Borodin rescued some of the music he had written for it for inclusion in his symphony. It's in a standard, four-movement layout, and Borodin himself attached a bit of a program to three of the four movements.

The first movement, he said, is a depiction of Russian knights from an age long ago. But it also adheres to conventional Sonata form, with a main theme arising from a noble melody heard first in unison strings, and a second, more lyrical theme contrasting it based on an old Russian folk tune. The second movement is a non-programmatic Scherzo and Trio design, and begins in a whirlwind Prestissimo tempo. In a clever use of previous material, the more gentle Trio uses elements of the folk song from the first movement as the basis for its main theme.

The legendary Russian minstrel Bayan, with his zither's sound reproduced in harp and pizzicato strings, is evoked in the third movement. A horn sings out the movement's first, tender melody – the woodwinds which answer it lend it a hymn-like quality. Gradually, an air of mystery seems to take over, with restless, darker swells and a dramatic fortissimo. These two moods, lyrical and luring, compete for dominance – the opening material getting the last word, and leading straight on to the final movement. Many a Russian work ends with a jubilant celebration or festival, and Borodin's symphony is no exception. A bright and radiant main theme emerges out from the quiet of the preceding movement, interrupted by a fanfare-like episode that changes the mood – but only briefly. Again, a reference to the first movement is heard in one part of the Development section, overwhelmed by a return of the main celebratory theme in the Recapitulation, leading to a buoyant conclusion.

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