

Bach, Wagner & Prokofiev

Saturday, April 28 – 8 pm

Jean-Philippe Tremblay, conductor

Ilya Yakushev, piano

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

ICHMOURATOV

***Jeunesse* (“Youth”) – Overture, Op.50** (9’)*

J.S. BACH

***Piano Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052* (arr. Busoni)** (23’)*

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

PROKOFIEV

Piano Concerto No. 1 in D-flat Major, Op.10 (15’)*

Allegro brioso

Andante assai

Allegro scherzando

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

WAGNER

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg: Prelude (10’)*

WAGNER

Three excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde* (23’)*

Act I: Prelude

Act III: Prelude and Scene I (Man hört einen Hirtenreigen)

Act III: Scene III (Isoldes Liebestod)

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

***Jeunesse* ("Youth") – Overture, Op.50**

Airat Ichmouratov

(b. Kazan, Russia, 1973)

First performed: July 28, 2016 in Montréal

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Program note by the composer:

Youth is the most magical period in our lives. It's a time of the most important experiences which will have an impact on our entire existence. It's a time to choose a profession, it's the time of the first kiss, it's a moment in life when we first make decisions as grown-ups... and for some - it's time to choose a path to make our world a better place, a place without war, a place where we can take care of our home, instead of slowly destroying it. Imagine... just imagine that this wild and beautiful ocean is simply your life, and you are a sailboat that crossing it, facing strong winds and brutal waves, sometimes failing, but standing up again and again in order to victoriously conquer your dreams.

"Youth" Overture is dedicated to Jean-Phillipe Tremblay and the Orchestre de la Francophonie on the occasion of their 15th anniversary (2016) and to the Youth of our Planet, ambitious and fearless in making our home a better place.

***Piano Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052* (arr. Busoni)**

Johann Sebastian Bach

(b. Eisenach, Saxony, 1685 / d. Leipzig, 1750)

Ferruccio Busoni's (1866-1924) relationship with the music of J.S. Bach dates back to Busoni's childhood. He credits his father, a professional clarinetist and one of his early teachers, for giving him instruction in Bach's music – an exposure to German music that most Italian music students did not receive. It also fostered in him a lifelong love of Bach, and a career dotted with numerous arrangements and transcriptions of Bach's works.

Eventually, Busoni would publish 25 volumes of transcriptions and arrangements over a 30-year period. Some of these were actually the work of other arrangers and transcribers, but published in Busoni's volumes. Busoni also wrote essays and other articles about the music of Bach. The keyboard for which Bach wrote his "keyboard" concertos was, of course, the harpsichord. Prior to his taking it on as a concertante instrument, the harpsichord was not thought of in that regard. So Bach's first attempts at concertos for keyboard were arrangements of violin concertos, many of them by Vivaldi, whose music Bach admired. But when he took over the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig beginning in 1729, the society's weekly concerts gave Bach the chance to flex his creative muscles, and compose his own keyboard concertos. Eventually, he would write seven concertos for solo harpsichord, three for two harpsichords, two for three harpsichords, and the *"Italian" Concerto* for harpsichord solo without orchestra. The *D*

minor Concerto is perhaps the best-known of the solo harpsichord concertos. Tonight's solo instrument for it is Busoni's own – the modern piano.

The concerto opens dramatically, and a little darkly, in the strings. The solo instrument, once it enters, exchanges thematic material with the orchestra, or joins in the orchestral texture. When given a chance to be highlighted, the keyboard part is quite challenging, complete with a brief cadenza near the movement's end. The slow movement, unusually for Bach, is also in a minor key (G minor). Like the opening movement, there is a dark drama here, the strings intoning a measured song, answered with a lovely plaint in the solo instrument. As the movement progresses, there is ever greater embellishment to the soloist's melodic line. The final movement is in an energetic 3/4 time, again with the piano woven into the orchestral line, but also given many moments to stand out from the ensemble, with passages almost toccata-like in their presentation.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in D-flat Major, Op.10

Sergei Prokofiev

(b. Sontsovka, 1891 / d. Moscow, 1953)

First performed: August 7, 1912 in Moscow

Last ESO performance: April 2017

Sergei Prokofiev's *First Piano Concerto* was a student work, dedicated to his composition teacher Nikolai Tcherepnin. Yet it already displays several of the hallmarks that would become features of many Prokofiev works. It was first performed while he was still studying, and while more than a few claimed to be shocked at its modernity, it proved popular enough to be repeated at Prokofiev's graduation in May 1914.

The piano part is formidable, and the entire concerto unfolds as a single continuous movement, although split into separate parts. The main theme is revealed at the outset, a repeating cascading motif out of which other ideas emerge. This main idea occurs three times – what Prokofiev called, “three whales that hold the concerto together.” After the first is a stern passage dominated by the solo piano; after the second is an Andante full of chromatic, even dissonant harmonies creating a haunting landscape. An mischievous Allegro scherzando leads into the concluding section, which begins quietly enough, but builds in energy and pace to the last, with another reminder of the main theme capping it off.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg: Prelude

Richard Wagner

(b. Leipzig, 1813 / d. Venice, 1883)

Opera first performed: June 21, 1868 in Munich

Last ESO performance of the Prelude: October 2017

There is no doubt of the place in musical posterity belonging to Richard Wagner. His operas (he actually preferred the term “music dramas”) broke with established musical tradition in many ways, and helped usher in music of the 20th century. The myths and legends of northern Europe (Germany in particular) were paramount in importance to him, as was the idea of redemption through true art, and true love. Excerpts from three Wagner works are next on our program.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (“The Master-Singer of Nuremberg”) was one of Wagner’s few comic operas; yet it contains some of his most profound observations on the importance of music. A full performance of it lasts some four and a half hours, so it’s probably no surprise that even its Prelude is a good ten minutes long. Contained within its length, however, are some of the work’s splendid themes, including the love theme, and that of the “Prize Song,” which will be sung in the opera by Walther, the hero, as the means for winning the love, and the hand, of Eva, the heroine.

***Tristan und Isolde*: excerpts**
Richard Wagner (see above)

Opera first performed: June 10, 1865 in Munich

The ESO last performed excerpts from the opera in February 2002

It was while Wagner was working on the titanic series known as the Ring Cycle that he decided to take on another epic story. He had long admired Gottfried von Strassburg’s 13th-century telling of the tale of Tristan and Isolde and, blended with his newfound fascination with the work of the philosopher Schopenhauer, he determined to create something. “I shall erect a memorial to this loveliest of all dreams in which, from the first to the last, love shall, for once, find utter repletion,” Wagner wrote to Franz Liszt. “I have devised in my mind a *Tristan und Isolde*, the simplest, yet most full-blooded musical conception imaginable.”

At the time, Wagner was staying as a guest at the estate of a patron, Otto Wesendonck. He would soon begin an affair with Wesendonck’s wife Mathilde (it has been said – wisely – that Wagner did not write *Tristan und Isolde* because he was in love with Mathilde von Wesendonck, but that he was in love with her because he was writing *Tristan und Isolde*). Wagner began sketching the work in 1857 and had it largely completed two years later. It would be another six years before it was finally staged.

A very brief summary of the story (the opera itself lasts a good four and a half hours, if performed with no cuts) is that Isolde, pledged to marry King Marke (Tristan’s uncle), is brought to Marke on a ship captained by Tristan. During the voyage, they have each been given a potion which has made them fall irretrievably in love, and they risk everything to be together – including their lives. Tristan, wounded in a fight for Isolde’s honour, returns to his own castle, with only the possibility of seeing Isolde again

keeping him alive. She returns at last, just in time for Tristan to die. As King Marke arrives – not to catch them but to bless their love, Isolde, too, dies.

In the music for the opera, Wagner all but did away with the conventional practice of diatonic key signatures and rhythms, in favour of music that was chromatic, asymmetrical, and revolutionary. *Tristan und Isolde* is widely considered as one of the works that sent 20th-century music on its way, and it was no long after its first performances that it seemed to divide the musical world. There were those eager to embrace Wagner's new sound world, and others just as adamant to write music as an "antidote" to it. Tonight's excerpts include the Prelude which opens the opera (and contains references to several important themes to be heard later), as well as the opening music from the opera's final act, in which a shepherd's pipe plays a mournful song. The final excerpt is the famous "Liebestod," the "Love Death" – sung by Isolde in her last moments.

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