

## **Beethoven's Fifth**

**Sunday, May 27 – 2 pm**

**Alexander Prior**, conductor

**Jeanne Amièle**, piano

**Laura Veeze**, violin

Sunday Prelude, 1:15 pm on the Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

Sunday Encore, post-performance in the Main Lobby with Alexander Prior, Jeanne Amièle & Laura Veeze

### **GLINKA**

*Ruslan and Ludmilla: Overture*

(5')\*

### **CHAUSSON**

*Poème in E-flat Major for Violin, Op.25*

(16')\*

### **RAVEL**

*Piano Concerto in G Major*

(23')\*

Allegramente

Adagio assai

Presto

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

### **BEETHOVEN**

*Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op.67*

(31')\*

Allegro con brio

Andante con moto

Allegro

Allegro

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

*Ruslan and Ludmilla: Overture*

**Mikhail Glinka**

(b. Novospasskoe, Smolensk, 1804 / d. Berlin, 1857)

First performance of the opera: December 9, 1842 in St. Petersburg

Last ESO performance of the overture: May 2014

Around the middle of the 19th century, composers who came from lands outside the major musical centres of France, Italy and Germany began infusing their compositions with the melodies and influences of their native lands' folk traditions. It became known as Nationalism. But a generation before the movement took firm hold throughout Europe, Mikhail Glinka was already doing it with music from his Russian homeland.

Glinka influenced a host of Russian composers after him, though he is known to us now chiefly by this charming and richly melodic overture. *Ruslan and Ludmilla* was his second opera, and it premiered in St. Petersburg on December 9, 1842. The drama of the opera, based on a story by Pushkin, centres around the efforts of three suitors to rescue the kidnapped object of their affection, the beautiful Ludmilla. The ESO recorded this overture on a CBC recording of *Canadian and Russian Overtures*, released in 1986.

### ***Poème for Violin and Orchestra, Op.25***

**Ernest Chausson**

(b. Paris, 1855 / d. Limay, 1899)

First performed: December 27, 1896 in Nancy

Last ESO performance: June 2009

As French music moved on from its obsession with Richard Wagner's new tonal world to the pastel impressionism of Debussy and his contemporaries, Ernest Chausson may have had an even more important role to play than he did. Unfortunately, his life was ended too soon; a bicycle accident at the age of 44 silenced an important emerging voice in late 19th century Parisian music. He was in the fortunate position of not needing to make his living via music. The son of a well-to-do family, he got a degree in law while indulging his passion as a sideline. Wagner acolytes Franck and d'Indy were major mentors for him, and he joined a group of other French musical luminaries which included Saint-Saëns, Debussy, and the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. It was for the latter that Chausson composed his most famous work, the *Poème for Violin and Orchestra*.

Ysaÿe had originally asked Chausson for a concerto, but it is thought that the composer was at the time taken with a novel by Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), which concerned a doomed love triangle. An early sketch of the work was even subtitled "Le chant de l'amour triomphant" ("The Song of Love Triumphant"), and indeed the layout of the *Poème* is in five sections (like a classical tragedy, perhaps), alternating slow, dreamlike sequences with more animated second and fourth episodes. While a

favourite work for violinist's now, Chausson had significant doubts about it, and in fact it was his friend, composer Isaac Albéniz, who paid for the work's publication out of his own pocket.

### ***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: January 2018

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.

### ***Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op.67***

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performed: December 22, 1808 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: September 2015

The work that begins with the most famous four notes in all of music was hinted at by Beethoven in sketchbooks in 1803, although the work eventually premiered at a massive all-Beethoven concert in 1808. The entire first movement, in fact, is built upon the seemingly insignificant foundation of those four very famous notes (three Gs and an E-flat, if you've always wondered) – and you can hear that motif echo in all four movements of the symphony.

The opening Allegro takes the motif and varies it, adds to it, and manipulates it with genius, creating variety with absolute continuity. The slow movement presents a theme which is given two major-key variations, bringing a sense of serenity following the opening movement's storm-tossed drama. The Scherzo is effectively dark, again in the minor key, and wandering away from the home key to wind up, near the movement's end, in E-flat minor. As C minor is again restored, Beethoven segues directly from this foreboding movement into the finale.

But the C of C minor is also the C of C Major, and Beethoven brings the symphony from shadows to brilliant sunlight as quiet timpani and strings burst forth with a triumphant brass fanfare. Piccolo, trombones and contrabassoons all make their symphonic debut in this final movement, one which shows two prominent aspects of the composer's personality – his noble, heroic nature as well as his broad sense of humour. One can't help but think that Beethoven had a ready laugh at us as the symphony nears its end – he seems to bring logical conclusions (or places where you could easily think you see the end coming) a half-dozen times before he actually does let the work finish.

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