

**Tchaikovsky, Borodin & Mussorgsky**

**Sunday, February 10 – 2 pm**

**Alain Trudel**, conductor

**Tony Yike Yang**, piano

**Allene Hackleman & Megan Evans**, horns

Sunday Prelude, 1:15 pm, Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with John McPherson & D.T. Baker

Sunday Encore, post-performance, Main Lobby with Alain Trudel, Tony Yike Yang, Allene Hackleman & Megan Evans

**HUMPERDINCK**

***Hansel und Gretel: Prelude***

(9')\*

**BORODIN** (orch. Rimsky-Korsakov)

***Prince Igor: Polovtsian Dances***

(12')\*

**McPHERSON**

***Concerto for 2 Horns (Mountain Triptych)*** (2017 ESO commission)

(21')\*

Sunrise: Calm

Rundle: Very still, but pressing

Sunset, Night Sky: Peaceful, open

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

**TCHAIKOVSKY**

***Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op.23***

(34')\*

Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso – Allegro con spirito – Tempo I

Andante semplice – Prestissimo – Tempo I

Allegro con fuoco – Molto meno mosso – Allegro vivo

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

***Hansel und Gretel: Prelude***

**Engelbert Humperdinck**

(b. Siegburg, 1854 / d. Neustrelitz, 1921)

Opera first performed: December 23, 1893 in Weimar

Last ESO performance of the Prelude: February 2005

One of the best-loved operas in the world, based on the well-known fairy tale of *Hansel and Gretel*, was actually only reluctantly coaxed out of its composer. Engelbert Humperdinck, a devout disciple of Wagner, took the words cobbled together by his fiancée, father, sister, and her husband and dashed off a quick series of scenes in the space of a month in September 1890. Jokingly referring to the project as “the family evil,” Humperdinck was not particularly impressed with what he had written. Everyone else who heard it, however, loved it.

Ultimately, with his fiancée’s encouragement, he kept at it. The prelude was one of the last parts written, sketched out in December, 1891. “It’s turned out to be rather long,” he said of his opera’s curtain-raiser, deprecatingly adding, “a kind of symphonic prologue that could be called *Children’s Lives*. It’s a pretty noisy piece.” Richard Strauss himself conducted the premiere of the opera two days before Christmas, 1893.

Anyone familiar with the opera will know the memorable and beautiful *Evening Prayer*, and it is this melody, nobly presented by the four horns, which opens the prelude. While sparkles and shimmers of other material from the opera flit by, the noble and tender mood created by the Prayer motive dominates.

***Prince Igor: Polovtsian Dances*** (orch. Rimsky-Korsakov)

**Alexander Borodin**

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

First performance of the opera: November 4, 1890 in St. Petersburg

Last ESO performance of the Polovtsian Dances: April 2009

Alexander Borodin, a full-time chemist and part-time composer, was one of a handful of Russian composers who deliberately sought to infuse Russian concert music with authentic Russian melodies and stories. His opera *Prince Igor* was his crowning achievement, but one he didn’t quite manage to complete before the congenial and sociable man died of a massive heart attack while attending a party. It is a lavish, grand opera, completed in part by his friend and fellow composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who did almost all the orchestration. The Polovtsian Dances make a spectacular conclusion to the opera’s second act, a lavish number performed in the opera with a full chorus as well as orchestra. It is just as often heard in the concert hall with orchestra alone – still rousing and thrilling in this guise as well. Broadway fans will hear many tunes familiar through the music’s adaptation for the musical *Kismet*.

***Concerto for 2 Horns (Mountain Triptych)*** (2017 ESO commission)

**John McPherson**

(b. Edmonton, 1958)

First ESO performance: January 13, 2018 in Edmonton

Last ESO performance: January 2018 at the work's world premiere

Program note by the composer:

The primary impulse behind this composition was the desire to fashion a fitting vehicle to feature my dear friends and colleagues, Allene Hackleman and Megan Evans. Their fabulous musicianship, magnificent sounds, and immaculate way they play together served as an abundant source of inspiration.

The secondary influence on this piece arose from the mighty landscape that is the Canadian Rockies. I was fortunate enough to spend three weeks at the Banff Centre last February in splendid isolation focused solely on the writing of this piece. Each morning I would watch the sun rise behind Rundle Mountain out my studio window, and each evening I would watch Venus appear above Sulphur Mountain as the sun set.

Being in a mountain valley seems to connect us directly to the bones of the Earth as well as to a massive time scale that puts our small lives and egos in radical perspective. The inexorable fathomless forces below and above silently impress upon our psyche. Thoughts become images:

1. **Sunrise:** the dark stillness melts away, the mountain glows, the valley stirs and our spirits awaken.
2. **Rundle:** some mountains appear more individual than others and we are drawn to them, what is the timeless, powerful, pressing song they sing to us?
3. **Sunset, Night Sky:** as the lapis lazuli fades to black, the clear sky gently fills with uncountable points of light, and the mountains become shadows sailing across an ocean of stars.

Fundamentally though, this piece is about Joy: the natural existential joy of being in the mountains; the profound joy of making music together; the heartfelt joy of a deep friendship; and the glorious joyousness that is the rich, resplendent, ringing sound of two horns at play.

***Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op.23***

**Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

(b. Kamsko-Votinsky, 1840 / d. St. Petersburg, 1893)

First performed: October 25, 1875 in Boston

Last ESO performance: March 2015

Imagine writing a concerto for someone, hoping he'll play it, and he writes of it, "The music is vulgar...unplayable...unworthy of its composer," among other things. Chances are, you'd remove the dedication, and find someone else. That's exactly what Tchaikovsky did with his *First Piano Concerto*,

crossing out Nikolai Rubinstein's name, and adding Hans von Bülow's, as the German musician praised the music highly. Completed in late 1874, the concerto was finally premiered on October 1875 in Boston.

The concerto's remarkable and very famous opening begins with strong horn pronouncements, followed by a rich, romantic melody for strings, punctured by powerful piano chords, and that followed by the piano taking up the rich melody itself. The real surprise is, following that sweeping opening, that lush melody never shows up in the work again. Instead, a secondary theme, based on a Ukrainian folksong, becomes the basis for the direction the music takes for the rest of the movement. Using a technique often employed in Russian concertos, Tchaikovsky uses repeated statements of the folksong theme to add decorative elements, growing more ornate, while the orchestra – which seldom plays along with the soloist – handles many of the movement's dramatic flourishes.

The second movement's A-B-A format combines a slow movement with a Scherzo. The A section is a lovely Andantino in D-flat Major first presented by the flute, then taken up by the piano. That is contrasted by a Prestissimo B section in a quick waltz tempo, the theme of which Tchaikovsky said was based on a French song, *Il faut s'amuser, danser et rire*. The finale is dominated by two main thematic ideas. A strongly Russian-flavoured dance introduced by the piano alternates with a passionately romantic secondary idea – one of those gorgeously rapturous melodies at which Tchaikovsky excelled.

As a footnote, it's worth mentioning that, following the concerto's enthusiastic reception at its first performances, Nikolai Rubinstein had a change of heart, and became one of the work's greatest champions, performing it several times in his career.

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