

## **Elgar's Violin Concerto**

**Saturday, January 26 – 8 pm**

**Bernhard Gueller**, conductor

**Robert Uchida**, violin

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

### **WIJERATNE**

***Polyphonic Lively***

(12')\*

### **SCHUBERT**

***Symphony No. 3 in D Major, D 200***

(27')\*

Adagio maestoso – Allegro con brio

Allegretto

Menuetto: Vivace

Presto vivace

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

### **ELGAR**

***Violin Concerto in B minor, Op.61***

(46')\*

Allegro

Andante

Allegro molto

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

***Polyphonic Lively***

**Dinuk Wijeratne**

(b. Sri Lanka, 1978)

First performed: October 13, 2016 in Halifax

This is the first time the ESO has performed any work by Dinuk Wijeratne

Sri Lankan-born Canadian Dinuk Wijeratne is a JUNO award-winning composer, conductor, and pianist who has been described by the Toronto Star as 'an artist who reflects a positive vision of our cultural future', and by the New York Times as 'exuberantly creative'. His boundary-crossing work sees him equally at home in collaborations with symphony orchestras and string quartets, tabla players and DJs, and takes him to international venues as poles apart as the Berlin Philharmonie and the North Sea Jazz Festival.

Program note by the composer:

Pol-y-phon-ic (adj.) – many-voiced, [music] composed of relatively independent melodic lines or parts.

Live-ly (adj.) – full of life or vigour.

While browsing through a library book of very vibrant artwork by Paul Klee, the 20th century Swiss-German master, I was struck by the title of one of the paintings: *Polyphonic Lively*. Though the two adjectives back-to-back suggest that something may have been lost in translation, I felt compelled to turn these very vivid and evocative words into music. They immediately conjured up high-vibration, high-intensity "chatter," and also seemed nicely suited to the celebratory nature of an orchestra's season-opener.\*

Music, as a communicative medium, offers unique and wonderful opportunities for stacking contrasting ideas - for "polyphony." As a composer I like to explore the possibility that musical voices, each conveying an idea that is either supportive or subversive, can be allowed to coexist in a way that often eludes us in today's world. The nature of *Polyphonic Lively* is character-driven and, through sharp turns and decisive action, its 'journey' is simply what the characters make of it. Its musical fabric is a multiplicity of voices, lines, and themes that decide - on a whim - when to coalesce and coexist.

\**Polyphonic Lively* was the first Symphony Nova Scotia commission from Dinuk Wijeratne in his capacity as RBC Composer-in-Residence, and in 2017 was awarded the Nova Scotia Lieutenant Governor's Masterworks Prize.

### ***Symphony No. 3 in D Major, D 200***

**Franz Schubert**

(b. Vienna, 1797 / d. Vienna, 1828)

Please see page \_ for a program note about Schubert's *Symphony No. 3*.

### ***Violin Concerto in B minor, Op.61***

**Edward Elgar**

(b. Broadheath, 1857 / d. Worcester, 1934)

First performed: November 10, 1910 in London

Last ESO performance: November 1999

“On my arrival in the morning, I found Sir Edward striding about with a number of loose pieces of MSS which he was arranging in different parts of the room. Some were already pinned to the backs of chairs, or fixed up on the mantelpiece ready for me to play.” Such was the recollection of W.H. “Billy” Reed, Concertmaster of the London Symphony Orchestra, when he visited the Elgars (Edward and his wife Alice) at rooms they had taken in London in the early months of 1910. The composer had asked Reed to come by to look over work Elgar had done on a violin concerto – a work Fritz Kreisler had asked Elgar for some four years earlier.

Being “Sir” Edward Elgar took up far too much of Elgar’s time and energy, and he often felt as if he had little time to compose. For this work, one of his most substantial orchestral pieces, he enlisted the aid of a number of violinists, particularly for bowings and fingerings. While Kreisler was the one who asked for the work (and to whom Elgar dedicated the concerto), it was a commission from the Philharmonic Society in 1909 that drove him to finish it.

Aside from its dedication to Kreisler, the manuscript also contains a quote from Alain-René Lesage’s novel *Gil Blas*: “Aqui está encerrada el alma de .....” (the five dots are Elgar’s), roughly translating as “Herein is enshrined the soul of.....” It is generally thought the five dots are for the first name of Alice Stuart-Wortley, Elgar’s close friend whom he nicknamed “Windflower,” who was a major source of inspiration for the music of the concerto.

The soft-hearted Elgar freely admitted to the sentimentality of the work. “...it’s good! awfully emotional! too emotional, but I love it,” he wrote to a friend. Each movement is large on its own, making the scope of the entire work one of the most ambitious in the repertoire. No less than six inter-related themes are presented in the orchestral opening, and each is given its turn when the solo violin makes its dramatic entrance. One of these themes becomes, when the violin presents it, the beautiful “Windflower” theme, one of the most lyrical passages Elgar ever wrote. The Development section is vast, as both violin and orchestra elaborate on the themes already presented.

In his book *Portrait of Elgar*, biographer Michael Kennedy described the second movement as, “a display of sustained and noble eloquence,” in which the strings of the orchestra are given a beautiful B-flat Major melody, over which the solo violin presents a graceful and heartfelt counter-melody. A contrasting central section is marked “nobilmente,” a phrase which Elgar used more than once in his works. The final movement features, in the words of scholar Blair Johnston, “fiendishly difficult violin arabesques, arpeggios, scales and chords,” as well as references to themes from the preceding two movements. But perhaps the movement’s most unexpected turn is in the extended cadenza, which the strings of the orchestra support with “pizzicato tremolando,” a unique “thrumming” effect.

The concerto was a success from its first performances, with Kreisler presenting it on many occasions. Kreisler himself, however, stated that the best performance he had ever heard of the concerto was one given by the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. While not performed as often as Elgar’s *Cello Concerto*, the *Violin Concerto* is a favourite of many soloists.

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