

**Tanya Tagaq with the ESO**

**Saturday, February 22 – 8 pm**

**Alexander Prior**, conductor

**Christine Duncan**, conductor

**Tanya Tagaq**, throat singer

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

**WEBERN**

***Passacaglia for Orchestra, Op.1***

(11')\*

**TAGAQ/DUNCAN/MARTIN**

***Qiksaaktuq***

(24')\*

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

//Solo//

Acceptance

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

**PROKOFIEV**

***Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op.44***

(38')\*

Moderato

Andante

Allegro agitato – Allegretto

Andante mosso – Allegro moderato

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

***Passacaglia for Orchestra, Op. 1***

**Anton Webern**

(b.Vienna, 1883 / d. Mittersil, 1945)

First performed: November 1908 in Vienna

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

In 1908, the 25-year-old Anton Webern would have just met Arnold Schoenberg – the most influential figure in his musical life. Already a promising musician, Webern sought out Schoenberg, from whom he began to take music lessons which would end up, of course, as one of the most important symbiotic relationships in music of the 20th century.

By the time Schoenberg had begun to work out his revolutionary ideas of serial, or 12-tone, music, Webern was a willing protégé and, along with Alban Berg, began to form the nucleus of what would be called the Second Viennese School – one that eschewed the traditional musical frameworks that had shaped western art music for two centuries in favour of a radically new approach to harmonic and tonal relationships. But Webern’s interest in early music remained an important part of his oeuvre. So it is no surprise that one of the first works he wrote that he himself considered to be important enough to publish (which is why it is listed as Opus 1, despite dozens of works composed earlier) is based on the ancient form of the passacaglia. Webern briefly left his post as conductor in Bad Ischl (one of his first jobs as a musician) to return to Vienna to conduct the premiere in late 1908.

The *Passacaglia for Orchestra* is not yet a serial composition, but it does reveal certain aspects of the composer Webern would become. It is concise, melodically spare, and almost mathematically constructed. A passacaglia is a variation form built on the foundation of a repeated pattern (the “ground bass”), over which a series of variations based on that pattern are presented. Webern’s work features 23 variations, while the repeated pattern takes flight as it moves along, shifting around until it is almost lost in the orchestral fabric.

### ***Qiksaaktuq***

**Tanya Tagaq / Christine Duncan** (orch. Martin/Mayo)

(Tagaq b. Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, 1975)

(Duncan b. Vancouver, 1961)

First performed: March 4, 2017 in Toronto

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Program note by Christine Duncan, provided by the Victoria Symphony:

“Qiksaaktuq” is the Inuktitut word for grief. This piece is dedicated to missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, and to those who grieve for them. *Qiksaaktuq* is written in five movements, based on the Kübler-Ross model of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

We sought to create a work that combines improvisation and notation, and captures the methods and spirit of a Tanya Tagaq performance. Jean Martin created an orchestral score (with the invaluable assistance of Christopher Mayo) comprising ideas from tracks and loops that have been part of Martin’s work with Tagaq over the years. To this, we have added hand cues with which Christine Duncan will

freely conduct the brass section, cues she regularly employs with Element Choir, the improvising vocal ensemble that has performed with Tagaq since 2014. Within this framework, Tagaq will create her part in real time. She will improvise a powerful lament for those women and girls who have been lost. All of these components are essential in the creation of the composed/improvised, or “comprovised” piece, *Qiksaaktuq*.

### ***Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op.44***

#### **Sergei Prokofiev**

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

First performed: May 17, 1929 in Paris

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Prokofiev arrived in Paris in 1915, wanting very much to replicate the success of his countryman Stravinsky, who had set the music world alight with his scores for Les Ballets russes. But repeated attempts to find success, either with opera or ballet, proved extremely elusive. The ballet *Chout* (“The Buffoon”), wrung with great effort from Prokofiev by Ballets russes impresario Sergei Diaghilev, was very well received, but the opera *The Gambler*, scheduled to be staged in Russia, had to be put off indefinitely by the October Revolution. Seeking more opportunities in the west, Prokofiev ran into financial difficulties while trying to mount another new opera, *The Love for Three Oranges*, in Chicago. He crept back to Paris, and by 1922, he was based in Switzerland, working on another new opera, *The Fiery Angel*. While working on it, his ballet *Le pas d’acier* (“The Steel Step”) was encouragingly successful.

The ambitious *The Fiery Angel*, however, ran into a series of problems. An attempt to mount a production in Berlin in 1927 failed, and in fact, a true fully-fledged version of the opera would not occur until after Prokofiev’s death. Reluctant to abandon what he had worked so hard on, Prokofiev would use much of the music he had composed for the opera for his *Third Symphony*, premiered once again back in Paris.

Russian-American conductor Serge Koussevitsky called Prokofiev’s *Third Symphony*, “the greatest Russian symphony since Tchaikovsky’s Sixth.” Prokofiev uses none of the program of his opera for the symphony, treating the music in absolute terms in creating a purely orchestral work. He found that the connective tissue of the music that linked scenes in the planned opera made creating a cohesive sonata form from them a relatively easy task. The first movement begins with clashing dramatic intensity, yielding to an ominous first theme – based on the opera’s heroine’s obsession with the angel of the title. Contrast is offered by two other thematic ideas, one a restless rising idea, the other a rhythmically angular series of triplets. The Development brings all these elements to a feverish boil set against a relentless rhythm, but as the Recapitulation begins, the music descends to an eerie and tense hush. The movement’s final word is given to the contrabassoon.

Music from the opera's last act, when Renata has sought the harbour of the convent, forms the basis of the slow movement. Masterfully orchestrated by Prokofiev, the music is soft and contemplative, but not delicate, ending with the sense of a processional. The symphony's third movement is a whirling and wild Scherzo, with music from the second act, full of demonic incantations, witchcraft, and dread. A number of orchestral devices are used to evoke the other-worldliness. There is a contrasting, quieter and pensive central section – the Trio to the outer main Scherzo sections.

The final movement begins with a thunderous foreboding, then a loud brass chorale emerges from a pulsing rhythm underneath. It is as if the gathering dark forces which have lent so much to the preceding movements have finally taken over, and we are being pushed to the abyss. Halfway through the movement, the music quiets once again to the mysterious murk that we heard in the opening and second movements. As one expects, the music rises out from this once again, clamorous and terrifying, leading to an apocalyptic conclusion.

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