

Orlando Philharmonic 2005-06 “Phil at Carr Series ”: *Opening Night Artistry: Sarah Chang:*

Notes provided by David R. Glerum, Music Director – WMFE-FM/NPR, Orlando

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) – Overture to *The School for Scandal:*

Samuel Barber was born in March of 1910 in West Chester, Pa. and died in Mt. Kisco, N.Y. in January of 1981 at the age of seventy. He began to study piano at six and a year later wrote his first composition. At the age of fourteen he entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, later studying in Rome. Within a four year period he was the first composer ever to win two Pulitzer Prizes. He is best known for his deeply moving and poignant *Adagio for Strings*; the affecting and nostalgic *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*; and the Pulitzer winning opera *Vanessa*.

His style is notable for its fluent and memorable lyricism and expressive Neo-Romantic feeling. Criticized during his lifetime for being “ultra-conservative” in relation to the modernist trends of the era, his music endures because of its ability to effectively express warmth and a sense of humanity.

Written in 1931 at the age of only twenty-two as Barber’s graduation thesis from the Curtis Institute, the Overture to *The School for Scandal* is a dazzling and nimble work that reflects the backbiting England so memorably captured in Sheridan’s eighteenth-century satire. Mirroring the liveliness and wit of the play, Barber’s music begins with a flourish which the American critic Edward Downes has compared to “a derisive burst of orchestral laughter.” This flourish returns at intervals to punctuate the work’s straightforward sonata form. The fleet-of-foot, or rather fleet-of-tongue pace slows only for the second subject, a lovely lyrical theme introduced by the oboe and probably a reference to the kindly Maria, a refuge of morality in a catty school of schemers.

Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904) – Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53:

- I. **Allegro ma non troppo -**
- II. **Adagio ma non troppo.**
- III. **Finale: Rondo giocoso, ma non troppo**

Only removed by one year now from the 100th anniversary of Dvorak’s death, it is good to step back and appreciate the enormous contributions this extraordinary composer has made to the repertory and to respect his legacy as one music history’s most gifted, natural, and prolific geniuses. Although numerous composers have expressed their profound appreciation, perhaps Johannes Brahms’ accolade is the most impressive: “I should be glad if something occurred to me as a main idea that occurs to Dvorak only by the way.”

Antonin Dvorak’s beginnings would not have suggested such eventual lofty status. Born from Slavic peasant stock, he was the son of a poor innkeeper and butcher in Nelahozevce, a small village outside of Prague. The young Dvorak seemed destined to follow down that same road. However, Dvorak’s father sparked an interest in music in his son through his zither playing at local weddings and other festivities and through his occasional performance of original dance tunes. Before too long son fiddled alongside father and came to learn and love the folksongs and dances of the region. Though his career was to take him around the world, these early years shaped Dvorak to the extent that he remained a ruralist at heart and was never happier than when in the countryside of his native Bohemia.

But given the young musician’s growing prowess as a musician, Dvorak would eventually leave village-life for studies that would take him to the larger Zlonice where he studied organ and where he also had lessons in music theory. Encouraged by his parents, in 1857 at the age of only sixteen Antonin went to the big city, enrolling at the Organ School in Prague. After graduating second in his class two years later, he went on to take a position as a violist in the Bohemian Provisional Theater Orchestra. During this formative time, Dvorak was also composing in a style increasingly influenced by the nationalistic music of Smetana, who served as conductor of theater orchestra. So promising was Dvorak that he was awarded a Ministry of Education stipend for composition in 1875, by a panel that included Brahms.

In Prague Dvorak gained a solid grounding in Classical musical practices. He came to have a deep respect for such composers as Mozart, Schubert, and especially Beethoven who all served as models. He also was much affected by Liszt and Wagner and assimilated aspects of their styles. He even contemplated moving to Vienna so as to try his hand at German form operas.

However, at the same time Dvorak was discovering a musical nationalism that would drive his music for the rest of his life. The music of Bedrich Smetana, grounded as it is in the folk idiom of Bohemia, made a powerful impression on Dvorak. Stemming from the realization that the tunes he learned as a child from his father could serve as a wonderful source of inspiration for his own music, combined with what he learned from Smetana about nationalism in music, Dvorak developed and stayed true to a musical philosophy that combined classical grounding in composition with inspiration and styles that came directly from his homeland.

The Czech people, long ruled by the Hapsburgs from Vienna, were struggling and fighting for emancipation in order to establish their own nation. Dvorak sympathized and strongly thought of himself as a committed Czech patriot. But he stopped short of activism. "But what have we to do with politics?" he once wrote to a publisher. "It is well that we are free to dedicate our services to a splendid art." While not a revolutionary as such, Dvorak remained patriotic and could not help being swept up in the nationalistic fervor of the time.

Dvorak's musical nationalism hardly ever manifested itself in direct quoting of folk song melodies, but rather found expression in the integration of the traditional characteristics of melody and rhythmic patterns of Slavonic folk music. Such was the case with *Slavonic Dances*, Op. 46, a set that met with immediate acclaim, thrusting Dvorak's career forward. The composer found himself becoming known beyond Czech provincial borders thanks to the respect and friendship of Johannes Brahms and thanks to the praise offered by the respected critic Hanslick and by such esteemed conductors as Hans von Bulow and Hans Richter. Prizes and honors of many kinds had begun to pour in and Dvorak was gaining an international reputation.

Encouraged by Brahms and spurred on by the publisher Simrock, the composer decided to try his hand at a violin concerto. The result was the Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53, composed in the summer of 1879 during this exciting period in Dvorak's career. The Concerto was immediately successful and has remained one of Dvorak's most popular scores. The first performance took place in Prague in October of 1883, with the Orchestra of the Czech National Theater and Frantisek Ondricek as soloist. These forces presented the concerto again to London audiences, and according to *The Musical Times* the Concerto ended in "a perfect storm of applause."

However, at first not everyone embraced the Violin Concerto with open arms. Despite the work's many virtues - including its engaging melodic lines and writing that provides a wonderful vehicle for a violinist to demonstrate musicianship - some have taken it to task for its unconventional architecture. The opening *Allegro ma non troppo* is not cast in traditional sonata form and does not end with the customary clean recapitulation. This departure from established structure has been disconcerting to purists. It troubled Joseph Joachim too, the very violinist for whom the work was intended. One of the great violinists of the time, Dvorak looked to Joachim for advice and was told that several changes had to be made. The composer accommodated many, but would not budge on the violinist's insistence that a clean break occur between the first and second movements. Rather than give in to the demand for such a separation, Dvorak remained firm in retaining the imaginative linkage of the first two movements through a brief *Quasi moderato* transition just where one expects a full-fledged recapitulation. Dvorak reasoned that by omitting a pause he could more effectively emphasize the continuity and emotional unity of the *Allegro* and the *Adagio* movements which are both profoundly reflective and lyrically related. He also considered them as a sort of collective counter-weight that could then be more effectively contrasted with the gaiety and rhythmic vitality of the *Finale*. Given the work's beauty, charm, and popularity it is a good thing that Dvorak stood his ground.

Modeste Mussorgsky (1839-1881): *Pictures at an Exhibition (arr. Ravel):*

Promenade. The Gnome
Promenade. The Old Castle
Promenade. Tuileries
Bydlo
Promenade. Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells
Samuel Goldenburg and Schmuyle
The Marketplace at Limoges –
Catacombs, Roman Tombs. Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua
The Hut on Fowl's Legs –
The Great Gate of Kiev

Born in 1839 in Karevo, Russia into a family of impoverished Russian nobility, young Modeste showed early signs of musical ability and developed into a child prodigy able to tackle piano concertos by the age of nine. Despite such promise, however, Mussorgsky had a minimal amount of musical training and remained an undisciplined composer known for a raw and rough style that would characterize his style throughout his musical life. For economic reasons he prepared for an army career and so was educated at a military cadet school. After graduating he joined the Regiment of Guards when he was nineteen.

Mussorgsky's heart was in music, though, and he started studies with composer Mily Balakirev, enabling him to become exposed to such admired composers as Beethoven and Schumann through playing four-hand piano reductions of their scores. In addition, Mussorgsky became a member of "The Mighty Five," or "The Russian Five," a group of young composers also including Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Their goal was to use Russian folk elements and subjects in their music. Unlike many great composers who were off and running with a music career at this stage, Mussorgsky instead wrestled with inner demons and began a lifelong battle with alcoholism. Psychologically unstable, in 1858 a personal crisis caused him to resign his commission in the guards. He complained that a bout with depression in 1860 rendered him incapable of sustained concentration. This condition plagued Mussorgsky throughout his life and explains his inability to bring various large scale plans to fruition.

After the serfs were given their freedom in 1861, Mussorgsky moved back to the family estate, where he spent two years trying to put its affairs in order. Eventually financial necessity dictated that he take a job, and so Mussorgsky took employment in the Engineering Department of the Ministry of Communications. He worked there for some four years before getting canned. During this time he became involved with the wilder extremes of artistic and political life, and after his civil career attempted to put these ideas into practice by living in a commune with five other men. Such an unorthodox life did little to improve his mental instability, however, and when his mother died in 1865, Mussorgsky drank even more heavily and developed all the symptoms of chronic alcoholism. Having been ousted from the commune, Mussorgsky ended up in the calmer environment of his brother's house in the country. While there he began composing again, writing some exceptional original songs as well as the orchestral piece, *A Night on Bald Mountain*.

A few years later Mussorgsky returned to St. Petersburg and renewed his artistic friendships. To make ends meet he rejoined the civil service as a clerk in the forestry department. But by this time the composer became more serious about his artistic calling and was convinced that it was his duty to portray the life of the Russian people as honestly as possible. In his words: "Life, wherever it is shown; truth, however bitter; speaking out boldly, frankly, point-blank to men – that is my aim. . . I am a realist in the highest sense – that is, my business is to portray the soul of man in all its profundity." It was out this strong conviction that in 1868 his greatest triumph was given birth: the Pushkin inspired opera *Boris Gudonov*. It wasn't produced until 1874, but it was received enthusiastically and was pronounced a masterpiece.

Despite such great success, unfortunately Mussorgsky had again taken to drinking heavily. The bottle limited his immense potential and eventually led to his demise. Mussorgsky's life was an almost continual struggle against poverty and alcoholism, and as a result his works are almost all marked by a primarily morbid and sometimes savage mood. He died in a St. Petersburg military hospital after an epileptic fit.

In the years around 1850 when Mussorgsky was involved with "The Mighty Five," the composer formed a close friendship with the movement's ally, the artist and architect Victor Hartmann. Hartmann's sudden and premature death at 39 stunned Mussorgsky and the entire Russian artistic community. Vladimir Stassov, respected critic and champion of the Russian arts movement, organized a memorial exhibit of Hartmann's work in February of 1874. Held in St. Petersburg, on display were some 400 of Hartmann's drawings, watercolors, and stage designs. Mussorgsky was deeply moved by the showing and was inspired to write in tribute his *Pictures at an Exhibition*. When he took up the piece the following summer, ideas came flowing out of him: "*Hartmann* is bubbling over, just as *Boris* did," he wrote. "Ideas, melodies come to me of their own accord, like a banquet of music – I gorge and gorge and overeat myself. I can hardly manage to put them down on paper fast enough."

Beginning life as an impressive work for piano, *Pictures at an Exhibition* is based on ten of Hartmann's creations. The breadth of Mussorgsky's musical imagination is amazing, bringing to life images ranging from playful to eerie to majestic. The composer's premise is intriguing: a stroll through an art exhibit with each musical setting conveying the mood of a different picture. Mussorgsky makes ingenious use of a *Promenade*, which serves to link his sketches together and to suggest the composer himself shuffling through a gallery and experiencing along the way the wide variety of emotions evoked by Hartmann's art works.

Pictures at an Exhibition quickly became extremely popular in its original version for piano. But its notoriety increased even more with a spate of orchestrations from the likes of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Maurice Ravel, Lucien Caillet, Leopold Stokowski, and many others. Ravel's orchestration is the one that has emerged as the gold standard. When he was approached by Serge Koussevitzky to fashion a new suit for *Pictures*, Ravel was enthusiastic, having always held Mussorgsky in high esteem for his daring conceptions and bold harmonic strokes. The result – coming almost a half century after the original piano version – was a masterpiece of orchestration remaining true to Ravel's voice while staying faithful to Mussorgsky. The work received its premiere in Paris under the direction of Serge Koussevitzky on May 3, 1923.

Your tour is as follows:

- 1.) *Promenade*. At the beginning, in the words of critic Vladimir Stassov: "The composer here portrays himself walking, now right, now left, now as an idle person, now urged to go near a picture; at times his joyous appearance is dampened, he thinks in sadness of his dead friend."
- 2.) *The Gnome*. Stassov continues that the subject is a "child's plaything...something in the style of the fabled Nutcracker, the nuts being inserted in the gnome's mouth. The gnome accompanies his droll movements with savage shrieks."
- 3.) *Promenade. The Old Castle*. Before a medieval Italian castle, a troubadour sings a melancholy song. The saxophone provides the depiction.
- 4.) *Promenade. Tuileries*. Set in the famous Paris park, Mussorgsky gave this scene the subtitle, "Dispute of the Children after Play."
- 5.) *Bydlo*. Mussorgsky based this scene on a watercolor showing an old-fashioned Polish oxcart lumbering along as the driver sings a plaintive melody (solo tuba) heard first far-off, then close-by, until the carts rocks off into the distance.
- 6.) *Promenade. Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells*. A Hartmann stage design serves as the basis for this vignette. For the ballet *Trilby*, the artist designed egg costumes for a number of boy and girl pupils. The get-ups resembled large eggs, with the dancer's head, arms, and legs protruding.
- 7.) *Samuel Goldenburg and Schmuyle*. This section was inspired by two pictures which Hartmann presented to the composer depicting a pair of residents of the Warsaw ghetto: one rich and pompous (strings and winds) and the other poor and supplicating (muted trumpet). Both themes are based on incantations Mussorgsky had heard on visits to Jewish synagogues.
- 8.) *The Marketplace at Limoges*. The scene here is of a bustling and lively market, with animated gossip being tossed back and forth between the female vendors.
- 9.) *Catacombs, Roman Tombs. Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua*. Hartmann is led by a friend with a lantern through cavernous Paris catacombs. Following without pause is "With the dead in a dead language." Mussorgsky wrote on the piano score: "Hartmann's creative spirit leads us to the place of skulls and calls to them – the skulls begin to glow faintly from within."
- 10.) *The Hut on Fowl's Legs*. This drawing represents the home of the Russian witch Baba Yaga, a hut in the shape of a giant clock atop a fowl's legs. Baba Yaga lore has it that she could fly through the air on a fantastic pestle. The music takes us on a whirling and wild midnight ride.
- 11.) *The Great Gate of Kiev*. This awe-inspiring conclusion to Mussorgsky's suite was inspired by Hartmann's design for a gateway (never built) to Kiev. The portal is crowned with a cupola in the shape of a Slavic warrior's helmet. The music is majestic and brings to our imagination the image of a massive edifice and a brilliant procession of medieval nobles entering the ancient capital through its arches. The work ends with a majestic statement of the *Promenade* theme and a jubilant pealing of the city's great bells.