

JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT CONCERT HALL

Sherwood M. and Judy Weiser Auditorium

Sunday, February 14, 2010

Adrienne Arsht Center presents

JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT

MASTERWORKS SEASON

SANFORD AND DOLORES ZIFF

CLASSICAL MUSIC

DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Leonard Slatkin, Conductor

Conductor endowed by the Kresge Foundation

Sol Gabetta, Cello

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Program

Le Corsaire Overture, Op. 21

Hector Berlioz
(1803-1869)

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 22

Allegro moderato
Andante sostenuto
Molto allegro ed appassionato

Samuel Barber
(1910-1981)

Intermission

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27

Largo - Allegro moderato
Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro vivace

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

Notes on the Program

By Octavio Roca

Le Corsaire Overture, Op. 21

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Born December 11, 1803, in La Côte-Saint-André, France

Died March 8, 1869, in Paris, France

The Byronic echoes of this 1844 piece are accidental: Berlioz had read and loved Lord Byron's romantic blockbuster poem *The Corsair*, but that was not the original impulse of this overture's creation. The composer first titled it *The Tower of Nice*, recalling the view from his window while on vacation in that lovely city; he then agreed to change the name to *The Red Corsair*, banking on the popularity of James Fennimore Cooper's novel *The Red Rover*, or *Le corsair rouge* in French. He eventually shortened the title to *Le corsaire*. Still, the romantic spirit of Lord Byron's swashbuckler seems to drench the score. Berlioz at times has a way of sounding like Beethoven gone slightly mad, and that madness and intensity—that sweet Byronic exuberance, if you will—is there in all its impulsiveness from the rambunctious first pages of this overture. A lightning flash of strings and rushing woodwinds introduces each of its three sections, the first of these a short and very lively allegro. The second section creates its own little universe of feeling, with an innocent violin line caressed by bassoons and interrupted only by what seems like intrusions from another world in the form of insistent percussive chords. These lead to a thunderclap of a climax that echoes the opening adagio, this time with all the brassy flair of an old love improved by memories.

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 22

SAMUEL BARBER

Born March 9, 1910, in West Chester, Pennsylvania

Died January 23, 1981, in New York City.

Samuel Barber completed his Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 22 in late 1945, shortly after his discharge from the U. S. Army, on a commission from Serge Koussevitzky and his Boston Symphony Orchestra. It would be one of the finest and most successful scores by this too often neglected American composer, one of the treasures of 20th Century American music. Its fiendish technical demands are, when met with equal parts of virtuosity and grace, of a piece with an irresistible lyricism. The concerto opens with an allegro

Notes on the Program

moderato of almost Stravinskian rhythmic complexity, a tumult that barely masks the profound longing in the cello's long line. That longing comes to the fore in the central *andante sostenuto*, a serene affair of unembarrassed sentimentality but also of an elegance that led Koussevitsky to proclaim that Barber's Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 22 would do for the 20th Century what Brahms' Violin Concerto did for the 19th. The unmistakably American cadences of the cello's melody in the *andante* recall in their poignancy Barber's vocal works such as his conversational masterpiece *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*. The third and final movement, *molto allegro ed appassionato*, boasts a complex and lovely dialogue between cello and orchestra where—as in the first movement—the cello seems to barge in mid-conversation with all the insouciance of an attractive surprise guest. This is American music at its finest.

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27.

SERGEI VASILIEV RACHMANINOFF

Born April 1, 1873, in Semyonovo, Russia

Died March 28, 1943, in Beverly Hills, California.

Rachmaninoff worked on his Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27 for most of 1906-1907, and he conducted the premiere himself in St. Petersburg on February 8, 1908. This is music from a young genius who is painfully aware of the changes occurring in his country, music that sings of a homeland from which he soon would be exiled forever. It is also a sign of the flowering of Russian orchestral music in the 20th Century, in its own way on the same exalted level as the symphonies of a tortured genius who stayed in Russia, Dmitri Shostakovich. It is also, most important, a ravishing piece. The score is mammoth, in the size of the orchestra as well as in length, melancholy from the start, dark and brooding in a very Russian way. The *largo* introduction is almost long enough to be considered a separate movement, but its mysterious waves of cellos and basses seem to land on what sounds like an inevitable *allegro*. The second movement, *allegro molto*, dares to be optimistic and borders on the giddy as it reaches a brief *scherzo*. Even here, however, there is more than a touch of resignation: the *Dies irae*, a Gregorian melody that found its way into several Rachmaninoff works, comes through in this *allegro* despite all the twinkling smiles. The third movement is rich, with *adagio* melodies so catchy and so beautiful that they have been mined more than once for pop songs. The impressive final movement, *allegro vivace*, is in the best Russian tradition of bringing everyone and his sister onstage for a curtain call, its sweeping sonata form making sense of all the musical ideas that had fought each other before. There is real life in this music.

Who's Who

LEONARD SLATKIN

Internationally renowned conductor Leonard Slatkin began his critically acclaimed tenure as Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in the 2008-2009 season. Additionally, he became Principal Guest Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 2008-2009. He completed his 12th and final season as Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra in June of 2008, and finished his three-year commitment as Music Advisor to the Nashville Symphony Orchestra this past June. Slatkin continues as Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Throughout the world, Slatkin's performances have been distinguished by imaginative programming and highly praised interpretations of both the standard and contemporary symphonic repertoire. Additionally, he is well known for his arts advocacy work on behalf of music education.

Highlights of his 2009-2010 season include guest engagements with such prestigious orchestras as the Vienna Symphony and the Orchestre National de Lyon. He will lead several world premieres with the DSO, and appears on the podiums of the Metropolitan Opera and Santa Fe Opera.