Sunday, November 18, 2018 | 3:00 PM

Russian Scenes

Dr. Robert G. Hasty, Music Director
North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie

Waltz Fantasy in B Minor.................................................................Mikhail Glinka
(1804–1857)

In the Steppes of Central Asia.........................................................Alexander Borodin
(1833–1887)

Overture on Hebrew Themes, Op. 34 bis..........................................Sergei Prokofiev
(1891–1953)

INTERMISSION

Prelude to Khovanschina ..............................................................Modest Mussorgsky/Rimsky-Korsakov
(1839–1881)

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, Op 63..........................................Sergei Prokofiev
Allegro moderato
Andante assai
Allegro, ben marcato

Masha Lakisova, violin, 2018 YAC First Prize Winner

This concert is supported in part by
The Village of Skokie, Niles Township, and the Illinois Arts Council Agency
Program Notes

One of the most influential forces affecting many aspects of life and culture in the 19th century was a social/political phenomenon known as nationalism. Nationalism decreed that one's primary loyalties were owed not to a dynastic state, religion, ruler, or government, but to an ethnically homogenous nation, to a people, to the motherland. A corollary of this nationalistic view held that the products of a culture, including its music, should reflect the character of the nation and people from which they sprang. Thus, musical nationalism became an important mode of expression for numerous composers, particularly those residing in areas whose musical heritages had been dominated by foreign influence.

Russia, though a land with a rich tradition of folk music, had virtually no indigenous school of serious or cultivated music prior to the 19th century. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries Russian cultural life had been dominated by the foreign influence of artists imported to please the decidedly Western tastes of the Russian court. Thus, cultured Russians grew up on a steady diet of French ballets, Italian operas, and German symphonies. Only during the 19th century, with mounting nationalistic feeling in the air, did Russian musicians begin to produce distinctly Russian music. This effort was led by a group of composers who have come to be known as the Mighty Five: Alexander Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, Mily Balakirev, César Cui, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Today's program features music by several of these Russian nationalists.

Glinka—Waltz Fantasy

Though not regarded as a member of the group, the de facto leader of the Mighty Five—its inspiration and ideological leader—was Mikhail Glinka. So important was Glinka's influence in helping to establish his country's musical legacy that he is often referred to as the father of Russian music. Born into a wealthy aristocratic family who largely disapproved of his musical pursuits, the self-taught Glinka is primarily remembered for his groundbreaking nationalistic operas A Life for the Tsar and Ruslan and Ludmila. Almost completely unknown is a great deal of music for piano, numerous songs, and a handful of works for the orchestra, including the Waltz Fantasy. Composed for solo piano in 1839, the brief work was orchestrated several years later. In structure, the Waltz Fantasy somewhat resembles similar pieces by Johann Strauss; a series of distinct themes (which some scholars believe are based on folk tunes) follow one another in a seamless melodic stream. Infused with melancholy, mystery, and passion, the Waltz could almost be described as somewhat wistful and pensive. In fact, in the margin of the original manuscript Glinka wrote, “All I know of love is the pain it causes.” The brief work reveals Glinka to be a gifted melodist and an inventive, if unconventional, musical architect.

Borodin—In the Steppes of Central Asia

Like Glinka, Alexander Borodin was born into privilege. He was the illegitimate son of an aging prince. His cultured mother saw to it that he was not only well educated but also exposed to the arts. As a result, he showed an affinity for music at a young age. However, it was science that particularly interested him. He earned a doctorate in chemistry and went on to pursue a long and successful career in that field. Even after making the acquaintance of Mily Balakirev and being accepted into the circle of the Mighty Five, Borodin remained first and foremost a scientist. Music was never Borodin’s vocation, simply a beloved hobby. As he once wrote: “I do not seek recognition as a composer. For me, this is a relaxation, a pastime, an indulgence that distracts me from my principal work.”
PROGRAM NOTES

Though he devoted comparatively little time to composition, Borodin completed a surprising number of works, including four operas, three symphonies, numerous chamber pieces, as well as songs, and works for solo piano. Among his most popular offerings is the masterful tone poem, *In the Steppes of Central Asia*. Composed in 1880, it was one of several tableaux commissioned from 12 different composers to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Tsar Alexander II. Each composer was assigned an event or time period from Alexander’s reign. Borodin was selected to depict the meeting of eastern and western peoples, as Russia confronted the Mongols and other Asiatic races in the far reaches of the empire.

To serve as a guide for listeners, Borodin wrote a picturesque program for the piece which was printed at the beginning of the score:

> In the silence of the monotonous deserts of Central Asia are heard for the first-time the strains of a peaceful Russian song. From the distance we hear the approach of horses and camels and the melancholy notes of an Oriental melody. A caravan emerges out of the boundless steppe, escorted by Russian soldiers and continues safely and fearlessly on its long way, protected by the formidable military power of the conquerors. It slowly disappears. The tranquil songs of conquerors and conquered merge in harmony, echoes of which linger on as the caravan disappears in the distance.

**Mussorgsky—Prelude to Khovanschina**

Perhaps the best known member of the Russian nationalist group was Modest Mussorgsky. Trained for a military career, Mussorgsky resigned his officer’s commission to take a post as a civil servant, a job that afforded him more time to pursue his love of music. Around 1860 he allied himself with Glinka and the Mighty Five. However, having had almost no musical education or background, the young man found composition difficult and struggled to produce a relatively small catalogue of works. Interestingly, it was this very lack of training that infused Mussorgsky’s music with a certain rough-hewn originality which came to be viewed as one of his trademarks. His compositional style is characterized by unusual harmonies, unorthodox scales, interesting rhythms, and a liberal use of and reliance upon Russian folk music. These traits are beautifully illustrated in the Prelude to his second opera, *Khovanshchina*.

*Khovanshchina* is Mussorgsky’s epic portrayal of the Moscow Uprising of 1862, a failed political-religious-military rebellion that ultimately led to the ascension of Tsar Peter the Great. The event was brought to the composer’s attention by music critic Victor Stasov, who noted: “It seemed to me that the struggle between the old and new Russia, the passing of the former and the birth of the latter, was rich soil for drama.” Though Mussorgsky worked diligently on the opera for almost eight years, it remained incomplete at his death. The work was eventually finished by his friend, Rimsky-Korsakov.
The Prelude to Act I was described by the composer as “depicting dawn over the Moscow River, early Mass at cock’s crow, the guards’ patrol, and the taking down of the chains on the city gates. “The gradual coming of daylight is evoked in a sequence of variations on a folk tune. The music begins delicately; as the sun rises higher, the tune swells and becomes more animated until bells are heard calling the faithful to church. As the bells die away, the music dissolves “like the mist from the river.”

**Prokofiev—Overture on Hebrew Themes**

Unlike the other three composers whose works are heard on today’s program, Prokofiev was not, strictly speaking, a nationalist—his career having flourished at a time when the nationalistic movement had somewhat dissipated. He was, however, a proud, patriotic Russian, whose love for his homeland never wavered, even when his career and life’s circumstances led him far away from his native soil.

By 1918 Prokofiev’s fame had become such that he undertook a tour of the United States, which included extremely successful appearances in Chicago and New York City. While in New York, the composer encountered a group of Russian musicians known as the Zimro Ensemble. Zimro had been formed several years earlier under the auspices of the Society for Jewish Folk Music to nurture the music of Jewish composers and culture, and to raise awareness for the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine. The ensemble, which included strings, a clarinet, and piano, toured across Russia and the Far East and in 1919, with sponsorship from the Russian Zionist Organization, came to the US with the specific objective of raising funds to establish a school of music in Jerusalem. Hoping to capitalize on Prokofiev’s prestige and popularity in the States to help promote their mission, members of the ensemble commissioned a work from him. The *Overture on Hebrew Themes* was premiered in New York on January 26, 1920, and was an immediate triumph. So popular did the work become that Prokofiev reluctantly transformed the original chamber setting into a version for orchestra.

The themes utilized by Prokofiev in the *Overture* supposedly came from a notebook of Jewish folk songs given to the composer by members of Zimro. Prokofiev did not identify the individual melodies on which he based the work, simply noting that he “chose a few pleasant themes” from Zimro’s collection. This lack of specific identification has led some scholars to contend that the themes were newly composed and not, in fact, actual folk tunes. One biographer wrote: “It is one of Prokofiev’s neatest achievements that he should have invented melodies which one would swear to be folk tunes, so characteristic are they of the genre.” Authentic or not, the themes have a distinctly Jewish cast, characterized as they are by unusual phraseology and piquant melodic shapes. The first theme is introduced by a solo clarinet. With its jaunty rhythms, shifting registers, and simple accompaniment, it is reminiscent of klezmer music. The second theme is a broad, nostalgic, singing melody. The creative manner in which Prokofiev utilizes these simple, folk-like tunes is a testament to his skill as a composer and orchestrator.
Despite a growing international reputation, Prokofiev’s status in his native Russia was increasingly compromised by his troubled relationship with Soviet officials. Upon permanently returning to his homeland in 1936, he was branded a “modernist” and (more damning) an “individualist,” renounced for his foreign trips, and his loyalty to The Party was called into question. Prokofiev began to suffer. Many of his works, deemed objectionable by Stalinist bureaucrats, were banned, commissions withheld, performances canceled, and at the height of the oppression, the composer saw his wife arrested for espionage and deported to a Siberian gulag. (The couple never saw each other again.) Several years later the once-celebrated musician died in poverty and neglect. Yet, many of Prokofiev’s most impressive scores come from these final years in Russia, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *War and Peace*, the Symphony No. 5, and the Second Violin Concerto.

Friends of the Belgian violin virtuoso Robert Soetens commissioned the Concerto in 1935, just prior to Prokofiev’s return to the Soviet Union from a whirlwind tour of Europe and North Africa. “The number of places in which I wrote the Concerto shows the kind of nomadic concert-tour life I had then. The main theme was written in Paris, the first theme of the 2nd movement at Voronezh, the orchestration was finished in Baku (capital of Azerbaijan), and the premiere was given in Madrid.” It was to be his last Western commission.

The work also exhibits Prokofiev’s newfound attempts—at least partially at the behest of Soviet authorities—to communicate with a larger public as opposed to the sophisticated elite. “In the Soviet Union music is addressed to millions of people who had formerly had little or no contact with music. It is this new mass audience that the modern Soviet composer must strive to reach.” Simplicity became the watchword. Yet, Prokofiev insisted that audiences wanted great music, not simplification. Thus, works such as the Second Violin Concerto are interesting stylistic hybrids and represent Prokofiev’s attempts to find a unique voice that balanced his own ideas of musical integrity with the rather more pedantic tastes of concert audiences and, more importantly, government overseers.

The Concerto opens abruptly. Without orchestral introduction the solo violin emerges with its melancholy theme of almost folk-like quality. Yet, unpredictable rhythmic accents and unexpected melodic turns add interest and depth. A new, equally lyrical theme appears, and the two ideas are developed with impressive rhythmic and harmonic variety. The second movement offers another perspective on Prokofiev’s deceptive simplicity, as a lovely, singing melody is sounded against an effortless orchestral accompaniment. The dream-like spell of the slow movement is brusquely dispelled by the heavily accented dance of the third movement. Prominently featured percussion instruments add to the brash, insistent mood as the composer’s one-time image as the *enfant terrible* of Russian music seems to make a transient appearance.

Program notes by Dr. Michael Vaughn

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Program Notes

Masha Lakisova, Violinist

“While it is not out of the ordinary for me to come across immensely and precociously talented youngsters as host of “From the Top,” it is quite a rarity to be introduced to a very young artist who displays not only incredible facility but the truest manifestations of artistry: devotion and dedication, a personal and rigorously integral aesthetic point of view, and the requisite leadership and responsibility for inspiring her peers. Masha Lakisova is just such a rarity, a true artist destined for great things.”—Christopher O’Riley, Host, NPR’s “From the Top”

“Ms. Lakisova is one of the most brilliant, communicative, and intelligent young musicians I have had the pleasure of hearing in recent years. She possesses a wonderful natural stage presence, musical maturity well beyond her young age, and a virtuoso command of her instrument which is always at the service of music.”—Vadim Gluzman, Violinist, Stradivari Society Artistic Advisor, and Recipient of the “Leopold Auer” Stradivari violin, 1690

At just sixteen, Chicago violinist Masha Lakisova is fast becoming one of the rising stars of her generation. She has had the privilege of performing in esteemed concert venues in the United States and all over the world. Masha has appeared as a soloist with more than 20 orchestras worldwide such as Kremerata Baltica, HEMU, Fox Valley Symphony Orchestra, and Lake Forest Symphony. At the North Shore Chamber Music Festival she became the first recipient of the Arkady Fomin Scholarship. She was featured on NPR’s “From The Top”, where she received the Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist Award, and on WFMT’s Introductions, both as a soloist and as a member of various chamber groups.

She has taken top awards and won numerous prestigious competitions such as First Prize at the 2018 Tibor Junior International Violin Competition, Second Prize at the 2015 International Andrea Postacchini Violin Competition, was named a 2017 National Young Arts Winner, finalist at the 2013 International Louis Spohr Violin Competition as well as the winner of Walgreens National Concerto Competition, and the DePaul Concerto Festival.

From 2011–2017, Masha was a member of Midwest Young Artists Conservatory, where she served as concertmaster in three orchestras and played first violin in four chamber groups. Her chamber groups have appeared three times on NPR’s “From The Top”, and they won the Gold Medal at the Fischoff International Chamber Music Competition in 2016 and 2017. They received 1st Prize in the 2015 and 2016 Rembrandt High School Chamber Music Competition, as well as 1st Prize at the WDAV Young Chamber Musicians Competition in 2017. They were also the overall winners at the 2016 Discover Chamber Music Competition and Silver Medalists at the 2016 St. Paul String Quartet Chamber Music Competition. In 2018, her Quartet Bellezza was accepted to the Juilliard String Quartet Seminar.
Masha currently studies at Julliard Pre-College with Professor Li Lin, and was previously a student of Grigory Kalinovsky, Drew Lecher and Larisa Zhizhin. Masha has taken lessons and master classes with such prominent virtuosi as Ana Chumachenko, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Miriam Fried, Shmuel Ashkenasi, Augustin Hadelich, and Ida Kavafian. She has collaborated with Vadim Gluzman, Pavel Vernikov, Svetlin Roussev, Ilya Kaler, Yossif Ivanov, Masumi Per Rostad, Rose Armbrust Griffin, Ani Aznavoorian, Mark Kosower, Christopher O’Riley, David Schrader, and the Ariel Quartet.

Masha has been accepted to many prestigious summer music festivals. In 2015, she attended the Heifetz Music Institute and has been a student at the Perlman Music Program since 2016.

Miss Lakisova is the proud recipient of a magnificent violin by Giovanni Francesco Pressenda (Turin, 1845) on loan from The Stradivari Society of Chicago thanks to the generosity of her patron, Edward Manzo.

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Dr. Robert G. Hasty is the Music Director of the Kenosha Symphony Orchestra, Principal Conductor of the Highland Park Strings, and the conductor of the Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia at the Bienen School of Music of Northwestern University where he also serves as the Associate Director of Orchestras. He is also Artistic Director of the International Schools Choral Music Society (ISCMS).

Dr. Hasty began his career teaching music in the public schools in Southern California. This included service as the District Music Coordinator of the Capistrano Unified School District where he supervised the K-12 music education program and its staff of 39 teachers. He also served an elected term as Vice President in charge of String Education for the Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association.

A noted researcher in music cognition, Dr. Hasty has been an author for two publications delivered at the 7th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition in Sydney, Australia. A book on his research on conducting has recently been published: *Critical Listening While Conducting*. The European Society for Cognitive Sciences of Music invited him to speak at their conference in Portugal on these studies.

As a conductor, Dr. Hasty has appeared with the All-American College Orchestra at Walt Disney World, Beijing Youth Orchestra, Elmhurst Symphony Orchestra, Grant Park Symphony Orchestra, Irvine Youth Symphony, La Primavera Orchestra, Merit Symphony Orchestra, Metropolitan Youth Symphony, National High School Music Institute Orchestra, Northwestern University Symphony Orchestra, NU Opera Theater, NU Contemporary Music Ensemble, as well as the Skokie Valley Symphony Orchestra. His performances have been broadcast on WFMT radio in Chicago and on the Big Ten Network. Dr. Hasty’s international engagements include the National Concert Hall of Taipei, Taiwan, the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing, China, the Shanghai Oriental Arts Center Concert Hall in Shanghai, China, the Busan Cultural Center Main Theater in Busan, South Korea, and the Suzhou Culture and Arts Center Grand Theater in Suzhou, China. He is sought-after as an honor orchestra conductor, conducting honor groups across the United States. He is a member of the conducting and music education faculties at the Bienen School of Music.

Dr. Hasty has also had a career as a freelance violinist and violist, having been a student of Alice Schoenfeld at the USC Thornton School of Music. Dr. Hasty was the violist on the world premiere of Kathy Henkel’s *Moorland Sketches*, which was broadcast on KUSC-FM Los Angeles. These days, you will find him fiddling in several Chicago clubs and venues with various local bands, most notably performing and recording with singer-songwriter Christina Trulio (ASCAP).
WE REMEMBER AND HONOR ROCHELLE CHASIN

Rochelle Chasin began taking lessons when she was six years old. She played violin in the high school orchestra and as an adult, she joined several chamber groups. She played with the DePaul Symphony and later joined the Skokie Valley Symphony and played under conductors Leo Krakow and Yve Cohen. She served on the SVSO’s Board of Directors and later became President of the Board. Rochelle was married and is survived by two adult children, Debbie Elisco and Larry Chasin and five grandchildren all living in the Chicago area.

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