A Walk to the Paradise Garden ................................................................. Frederick Delius
(1862-1934)

Hamlet, Symphonic Poem No. 10......................................................... Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

Romeo and Juliet, Suite No. 2 ............................................................... Sergei Prokofiev
Montagues and Capulets
Juliet, the Young Girl
Friar Laurence
Dance
Romeo at Juliet’s Grave

INTERMESSION

Symphonie fantastique:
An Episode in the Life of an Artist, in Five Parts, Op. 14 ....................... Hector Berlioz
Reveries – Passions
A Ball
Scene in the Fields
March to the Scaffold
Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath

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

Delius – A Walk to the Paradise Garden

Written in 1901, English composer Frederick Delius’ opera, A Village Romeo and Juliet is acknowledged by most scholars to be his first notable work. Delius and his wife crafted the English libretto themselves, basing it on the short story Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe (Romeo and Juliet from the Village) by the Swiss author Gottfried Keller. Essentially a retelling of the Shakespeare original, it concerns two young peasants whose love for one another is frustrated by a feud between their families. Their attempts to be together are thwarted at every turn and they find solace only at the Paradise Garden, a local tavern frequented by vagrants and the poor. Here, society’s outcasts are welcomed; happiness and acceptance are offered to all regardless of station or position. That Romeo and Juliet fail to grasp it is the real tragedy of Delius’ opera. At the end of the work, they resolve to commit suicide together, drifting out onto a river in a boat, which they sink.

“The Walk to the Paradise Garden” was not part of Delius’ original conception of the opera. It was written shortly before the 1907 premier to accommodate a lengthy scene change. Nonetheless, it became the centerpiece of the opera, both dramatically and musically. From the standpoint of the plot, this wordless walk to the tavern symbolizes the lovers’ chance to rebel against their families; their chance to leave societal pressures behind and to enter into the happiness represented by the metaphorical Paradise Garden. Musically, the intermezzo is one of the composer’s finest works, a tone poem that draws together motives from the previous scenes. The piece begins quietly, as a horn introduces a warm, tranquil theme that is eventually taken over by the woodwinds. In time, the interlude climaxes with a full orchestral presentation of the opera’s love theme, as the lovers find a fleeting peace as they walk through the woods towards the tavern. The music ends, trailing off into silence, as they return to life and to the events that will eventually bring about their union in death.

Liszt – Hamlet

During the 19th century, an increasing number of artists came to believe that music and literature were of equal value and importance, and when the two were brought together, music’s spiritual content was strengthened and clarified. Franz Liszt enthusiastically embraced these ideas, writing in an essay, “music in general – and especially instrumental music – has to be more closely connected with poetry and other forms of literature.” To satisfy his desire for this type of expression, as well as to overcome what he felt were the shortcomings or limitations of traditional instrumental forms such as the symphony, Liszt introduced a new musical genre known as the tone poem or symphonic poem. Under Liszt, these were one-movement compositions of an extended nature designed to tell a story or suggest an extra-musical idea. He completed twelve symphonic poems in total, in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Liszt’s final symphonic poem was Hamlet, composed in 1858. It is both a character study and a profound psychological portrait of its hero. It portrays the various psychological mood swings that plague Hamlet throughout Shakespeare’s intense play. The musical themes associated with Hamlet himself have an indecisive, brooding quality, while contrast is provided by two gently yearning passages representing Ophelia. At the start, we sense Hamlet’s vexing thoughts and doubts, as we hear his oscillations of indecision.
We hear the tormented Hamlet hesitantly rise in one direction only to sink back into confusion. Slowly he begins to plot his revenge. As the music swells, he suddenly snaps into a violent frenzy, as we feel his mind crack into a psychotic rage. Just as abruptly, his rage halts, temporarily interrupted by the delicate melody of Ophelia. The end draws near as he eventually releases a dark moan, a final quiver and, with the last beat, Hamlet expires. The work concludes with a funeral march in which fragments of Hamlet’s earlier themes are recalled.

**Prokofiev – Romeo and Juliet, Suite No. 2**

Serge Prokofiev’s music for the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* indirectly stems from his long association with Serge Diaghilev, founder of the legendary Ballets Russes. The composer and dance impresario met for the first time in London in 1914, whereupon Diaghilev presented Prokofiev with his first ballet commission, asking him to create a ballet on a Russian fairy tale. Though the work was eventually rejected on grounds that it was too similar to Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* (premiered by the Ballets Russes in 1912), Prokofiev’s career as a composer of ballet music was begun.

Certainly, the most famous of Prokofiev’s nine ballets is *Romeo and Juliet*, originally commissioned by the Kirov Theater in 1933. When Soviet political machinations at the Kirov forced the cancellation of the new work, it was picked up by the Bolshoi Theater.
In our neighborhood, dinner is a time when friends get together to enjoy engaging stories and culinary delights. At both our fine dining and casual dining options, our chefs create meals that cater to all tastes. Resident-inspired dishes and good friends create a dining experience that is delicious and delightful. Schedule a visit today.
However, the Bolshoi soon backed out of its contract, declaring the music “impossible to dance to.” A more plausible explanation is that theater officials, as well as musicians and dancers, were fearful of being associated with Prokofiev, whose avant-garde tendencies had earned him several denouncements from Soviet officials. The difficulty in getting the work performed spawned a play on words borrowed from the last lines of Shakespeare’s play: “There is no tale of greater woe than Prokofiev’s music for Romeo.” The ballet was finally performed in Czechoslovakia in 1938 and in the Soviet Union in 1940. While a frustrated Prokofiev waited for the premier, he crafted two suites for concert use based on some of the best moments from the full score. The more popular second suite was first performed in Leningrad in 1937. Thus, by the time the full ballet was given in 1940, most of the music had been heard in concert.

The suite does not follow the action of the Shakespeare play; instead it is a series of character pieces and scenes. The movements are as follows:

**The Montagues and Capulets** – Dissonant chords remind us of the conflict between the two families, which is further portrayed by a heavy, angular march (perhaps the most well-known theme from the entire ballet). A delicate minuet represents Juliet and her suitor, Paris.

**Juliet as a Young Girl** – This lilting musical portrait depicts the heroine as a carefree, innocent teenager, though the introduction of a lyrical woodwind theme suggests a budding maturity.

**Friar Laurence** – The sympathetic priest who facilitates Romeo and Juliet’s romance is represented by a solemn legato theme in the bass voices of the orchestra.

**Dance** – This movement, a light, brilliant scherzo, has little or no relation to the plot.

**Romeo at Juliet’s Grave** – An anguished theme in the strings is taken up by other instruments, before the love theme – cast now in a minor mode – attempts to reassert itself. A delicate recapitulation of the love music brings the suite to a quiet, resigned conclusion.

**Berlioz – Symphonie fantastique**

In 1826 Berlioz attended a Parisian performance of *Hamlet* given by an itinerant English theatrical troupe and was immediately smitten by the actress portraying Ophelia, Harriet Smithson. So complete was his obsession with the young Irish thespian, that during the remainder of her stay in Paris, he showered her with gifts, love letters, and numerous invitations to meet. Despite (or perhaps because of) his persistence, she refused his numerous invitations and left town without having met her would-be suitor. To assuage his disappointment and express his ardor in a tangible manner, Berlioz penned the epic *Symphonie fantastique*, in which his hallucinogenic fantasies of unrequited love are brought to musical life. Some two years after the work’s completion, Harriet happened to attend a performance. At the stunned realization that the symphony was about her, she arranged to meet Berlioz the next day. The couple was married a year later, though the marriage was not happy, resulting in a separation and an equally unhappy reunion.
In addition to its standing as one of music’s greatest love letters, the *Symphonie fantastique* is also acknowledged as a landmark of the symphonic repertoire and one of the most influential works of the entire 19th century. It stretches the boundaries of the traditional symphony and is revolutionary in its orchestration, form, and expressive intent. Through its movements, it tells the story of an artist’s self-destructive passion and describes his obsession and dreams, tantrums and moments of tenderness, and visions of suicide and murder, ecstasy and despair.

A work of such descriptive expressivity demanded brilliant orchestral writing. Calling for an atypically large orchestra, and requiring almost virtuoso skill from each player, the work is a tour de force. Unusual orchestral effects, such as striking the strings with the stick of the bow, and the use of instruments not often heard at the time, such as the tuba, English horn, cornet, and a wide array of percussion, add extraordinary color and interest to the score.

In order to unify the symphony’s five disparate movements, as well as to render its programmatic intent explicit, Berlioz created a single melody that recurs throughout the work; a melody that represents Harriet Smithson. He referred to this tune as the *idée fixe* – a preoccupation or obsession of the mind. As his feelings towards Harriet change, the *idée fixe* is changed or transformed to reflect those moods.

The most striking element of the symphony is the program itself; it represents the first complete program symphony and one of the most detailed and vivid pieces of program music ever written. Unlike previous composers, such as Beethoven and Mendelssohn, who had provided brief descriptions or titles to their programmatic works, Berlioz took no chances regarding the interpretation of his music and so crafted a detailed autobiographical essay describing an artist’s self-destructive passion for a beautiful woman. Audiences of the time were bewildered by the lengthy pamphlet that Berlioz insisted be distributed each time the work was performed. The full program is as follows:

**Note**
The composer’s intention has been to develop various episodes in the life of an artist (Berlioz himself), in so far as they lend themselves to musical treatment. As the work cannot rely on the assistance of speech, the plan of the instrumental drama needs to be set out in advance. The following programme must therefore be considered as the spoken text of an opera, which serves to introduce musical movements and to motivate their character and expression.

**Part one**
*Daydreams - passions*

The author imagines that a young musician (Berlioz), afflicted by the sickness of spirit which a famous writer has called the vagueness of passions (*le vague des passions*), sees for the first time a woman who unites all the charms of the ideal person his imagination was dreaming of, and falls desperately in love with her. By a strange anomaly, the beloved image never presents itself to the artist’s mind without being associated with a musical idea, in which he recognizes a certain quality of passion, but endowed with the nobility and shyness which he credits to the object of his love.
This melodic image and its model keep haunting him ceaselessly like a double idée fixe. This explains the constant recurrence, in all the movements of the symphony, of the melody which launches the first allegro. The transitions from this state of dreamy melancholy, interrupted by occasional upsurges of aimless joy, to delirious passion, with its outbursts of fury and jealousy, its returns of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolations – all this forms the subject of the first movement.

**Part two**
**A Ball**
The artist finds himself in the most diverse situations in life, in the tumult of a festive party, in the peaceful contemplation of the beautiful sights of nature, yet everywhere, whether in town or in the countryside, the beloved image keeps haunting him and throws his spirit into confusion.

**Part three**
**Scene in the Countryside**
One evening in the countryside, he hears two shepherds in the distance dialoguing with their ‘ranz des vaches’ (a simple tune played on shepherd’s or alpine horn); this pastoral duet, the setting, the gentle rustling of the trees in the wind, some causes for hope that he has recently conceived, all conspire to restore to his heart an unaccustomed feeling of calm and to give to his thoughts a happier coloring. He broods on his loneliness, and hopes that soon he will no longer be on his own… But what if she betrayed him! This mingled hope and fear, these ideas of happiness, disturbed by dark premonitions, form the subject of the adagio. At the end, one of the shepherds resumes his ‘ranz des vaches’; the other one no longer answers. Distant sound of thunder… solitude… silence…

**Part four**
**March to the Scaffold**
Convinced that his love is spurned, the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of narcotic, while too weak to cause his death, plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by the strangest of visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold and is witnessing his own execution. The procession advances to the sound of a march that is sometimes somber and wild, and sometimes brilliant and solemn, in which a dull sound of heavy footsteps follows without transition, the loudest outbursts. At the end of the march, the first four bars of the idée fixe reappear like a final thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow.

**Part five**
**Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath**
He sees himself at a witches’ sabbath, in the midst of a hideous gathering of shades, sorcerers and monsters of every kind who have come together for his funeral. Strange sounds, groans, outbursts of laughter; distant shouts which seem to be answered by more shouts. The beloved melody appears once more, but has now lost its noble and shy character; it is now no more than a vulgar dance tune, trivial and grotesque: it is she who is coming to the sabbath… Roar of delight at her arrival… She joins the diabolical orgy… The funeral knell tolls, burlesque parody of the Dies Irae (a medieval Catholic funeral hymn), the dance of the witches. The dance of the witches combined with the Dies Irae.

By Michael Vaughn, Ph.D.  *No replication of text is allowed without the author’s permission.*
In September, Chris led the Chicago Composers Orchestra in the world premiere of the opera *Andina* composed by Eustasio Rosales. Consequently, he was awarded a 2017 Banff Winter Residency position. For two weeks in January, Chris was at the Banff Arts Centre in Alberta, Canada, editing the opera. In 2011, he was the winner of the American Prize in Orchestral Conducting.

Currently, Christopher Ramaekers is the Principal Conductor of the Ravenswood Community Orchestra and he is the Music Director of the Hyde Park Youth Symphony in Chicago. Chris was Music Director of the Orchestra of St. Vincent’s for five years, and the summer of 2013 marks his fourth season as Director of Orchestras at Camp Encore/Coda in Sweden, Maine.

As a guest conductor, Chris has appeared with the Kalamazoo Symphony, North Shore Chamber Orchestra, Salt Creek Chamber Orchestra, the Alice Millar Brass Ensemble, ensemble dal niente, the Palomar Ensemble, and the Chicago Opera Vanguard. Chris is a 2012-2013 Conducting Fellow with the Allentown (PA) Symphony Orchestra and is a part of the 2013 Emerging Conductors Program with the Peninsula Music Festival. He is currently pursuing a Doctor of Music at Northwestern University where he studies with Victor Yampolsky. This is his second season conducting concerts with the Skokie Valley Symphony Orchestra.

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