

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2016-2017 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 31 and April 2, 2017

LIONEL BRINGUIER, CONDUCTOR  
EDWARD R. KELLY, VIOLA

MAURICE RAVEL

*Ma Mère l'Oye* [Mother Goose], Ballet in One Act

- I. Prelude
- II. Spinning Wheel Dance
- III. Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty
- IV. Tom Thumb
- V. Conversations of Beauty and the Beast
- VI. Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas
- VII. The Enchanted Garden

NICOLÒ PAGANINI

Sonata per la Grand Viola

Introduction: Larghetto — Recitativo e piacere —  
Cantabile, Andante sostenuto —  
Theme and Variations

Intermission

MODEST MUSSORGSKY  
arr. RAVEL

*Pictures at an Exhibition*

- Introduction: Promenade
- I. Gnomus
  - II. Il vecchio castello
  - III. Tuileries
  - IV. Bydlo
  - V. Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells
  - VI. Two Polish Jews (Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle)
  - VII. The Marketplace at Limoges
  - VIII. Catacombae - Cum mortuis in lingua mortua
  - IX. The Hut on Hen's Legs (Baba-Yaga)
  - X. The Great Gate of Kiev

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### MAURICE RAVEL

#### *Ma Mère l'Oye* ("Mother Goose"), Ballet in One Act (1908; orchestrated in 1911)

Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France on March 7, 1875 and died in Paris on December 28, 1937. We first conceived of Mother Goose as a piece for piano four-hands in 1908, before orchestrating it as a ballet in 1911. The ballet premiered at the Théâtre des Arts on January 28, 1912, led by Gabriel Grovlez. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed selections from the ballet in 1931, before music director Andre Previn led the complete Pittsburgh premiere on October 1, 1976, in Heinz Hall. Most recently, the Pittsburgh Symphony performed the complete ballet on December 13, 1992, again with Andre Previn. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, two horns, timpani, percussion, celeste, harp and strings.

**Performance time: approximately 28 minutes**

"I would settle down on his lap, and tirelessly he would begin, 'Once upon a time ...' It was *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Ugly Empress of the Pagodas*, and, above all, the adventures of a little mouse he invented for me. I laughed a great deal at this last story; then I felt remorseful, as I had to admit it was very sad." So Mimi Godebski reminisced in later years about the visits of Maurice Ravel to her family's home during her childhood. Ravel, a contented bachelor, enjoyed those visits to the Godebskis, and took a special delight in playing with the young children — cutting out paper dolls, telling stories, romping around on all fours. Young Mimi and her brother Jean were in the first stages of piano tutelage in 1908, and Ravel decided to encourage their studies by composing some little pieces for them portraying their favorite fairy stories.

Ravel based his music on four traditional tales: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Hop o' My Thumb*, *Empress of the Pagodas* and *Beauty and the Beast*. To these he added an evocation of *The Enchanted Garden* as a postlude. In 1911, he made a ravishing orchestral transcription of the original five pieces, added to them a prelude, an opening scene and connecting interludes, and produced a ballet with a scenario based on the *Sleeping Beauty* story for the Théâtre des Arts in Paris. The production, though it quickly disappeared from the boards, was successful at the premiere, and its charm led the celebrated dancer Nijinsky, who was in the audience, to tell Ravel, "It's like dancing at a family party."

The opening *Prelude* and *Dance of the Spinning Wheel* present the Princess Florine, who pricks her finger on a spindle and falls into a deep sleep. The tiny *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty*, only twenty measures long, summons the Good Fairy, who watches over the Princess during her somnolence. An interlude leads to the *Conversations of Beauty and the Beast*. Ravel prefaced this scene with lines from the tale as interpreted by Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1757: "When I think how good-hearted you are, you do not seem to me so ugly." 'Yes, I have, indeed, a kind heart; but I am a monster.' 'There are many men more monstrous than you.' 'If I had wit, I would invent a fine compliment to thank you, but I am only a beast.' 'Beauty, will you be my wife?' 'No, Beast!' 'I die content since I have the pleasure of seeing you again.' 'No, my dear Beast, you shall not die; you shall live to be my husband!' The Beast had disappeared, and she saw at her feet only a prince more beautiful than Love, who thanked her for having broken his enchantment." This piece, influenced by a certain Satie-esque insouciance, is among the most graphic in Ravel's output. The high woodwinds sing the delicate words of the Beauty, while the Beast is portrayed by the lumbering contrabassoon. At first the two converse, politely taking turns in the dialogue, but after their betrothal, both melodies are entwined, and finally the Beast's theme is transfigured into a floating wisp in the most ethereal reaches of the solo violin's range.

Following an Interlude, *Hop o' My Thumb* treats the old legend taken from Perrault's anthology of 1697. "A boy believed," noted Ravel of the tale, "that he could easily find his path by means of the bread crumbs he had scattered wherever he passed; but he was very much surprised when he could not find a single crumb: the birds had come and eaten everything up." The strings meander through scales as the boy wanders through the woods, with a few of his aviary nemeses returning to scavenge for the last morsels of bread.

*Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas* depicts a young girl cursed with ugliness by a wicked fairy. According to Ravel's inscription, "She undressed herself and went into the bath. The pagodas [grotesque little figures made of porcelain, crystal or precious jewels] began to sing and play on instruments; some had theorbos [large lutes] made of walnut shells; some had viols made of almond shells; for they were obliged to proportion the instruments to their figures." This tale, too, has a happy ending in which the Empress' beauty is restored. The music, introduced by a lovely interlude featuring the harp, is decidedly oriental in character, and is playable in the original version almost entirely on the black keys of the piano.

The rapt, introspective splendor of the closing *Enchanted Garden* is not derived from a particular story, but is Ravel's masterful summation of the beauty, mystery and wonder that pervade *Ma Mère l'Oye*. Its tranquil, shimmering serenity is matched among Ravel's works only by some pages from the opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, his other masterwork inspired by a vision of childhood. During this final scene of the ballet, Prince Charming awakens Princess Florine with a kiss, and all the characters gather around the royal couple as the Good Fairy bestows her blessing.

## NICOLÒ PAGANINI

### Sonata per la Grand Viola (1834)

Nicolo Paganini was born in Genoa on October 27, 1782, and died in Nice on May 27, 1840. He wrote his *Sonata per la Grand Viola* in 1834, and he premiered it as the soloist in London on April 27, 1834. Edward R. Kelly gave the Pittsburgh Symphony's subscription premiere and most recent performance on January 16-18, 1987 with conductor Michael Tilson Thomas. The score calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings.

**Performance time: approximately 13 minutes**

During a visit to England in the spring of 1833, Paganini, perhaps seeking a new challenge, perhaps looking for a way to augment his peerless reputation as the greatest string virtuoso of the age, purchased a magnificent Stradivarius viola from the London instrument dealer George Corsby. In May, he tried out his new acquisition by composing and performing (privately) a *Trio Concertante* for Viola, Cello and Guitar (an instrument he had also mastered), and he was intrigued enough by the potential of the viola as a solo instrument to inquire about a large-size "grand viola" owned by his friend and fellow string player Luigi Germa, which was reputed to have a depth and sonority of tone resembling the human voice. (Neither the maker nor the fate of the "grand viola" is known. Paganini's Stradivarius viola was purchased by the Nippon Music Foundation from the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. in 1994 as part of a complete quartet set by Stradivarius, and was played for many years by Kazuhide Isomura of the Tokyo String Quartet. The entire collection is now on loan to Austria's Hagen Quartet.) Later that year Paganini, inspired by a performance of the *Symphonie Fantastique* in Paris, commissioned Hector Berlioz to write a concerto for viola, but he was dissatisfied with the gestating work when he saw the draft of the first movement. ("That's no good," he told the composer. "There's not enough for me to do. I should be playing all the time.") Paganini never did perform what became Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* (a "symphony with viola solo," according to its composer), but he did write his own solo work for viola and orchestra sometime early in 1834, which he apparently intended to perform on Germa's "grand viola." He introduced this *Sonata per la Grand Viola* in London on April 27, 1834 — his public debut as a violist — but it achieved only a modest success. The critic for the *Times* praised "the exceedingly rich and mellow effect" on the lower strings, but found "the upper notes and the rapid divisions not so clear," and counseled that Paganini was "unrivalled on the violin and should seek no change [of instrument]." After trying the viola at a few more concerts before leaving London in June, Paganini gave up on it as a solo instrument, though his brief flirtation with it yielded two of the most important items in the viola's 19th-century concert repertory.

The *Sonata per la Grand Viola* (Paganini also arranged it for guitar accompaniment) displays not only the technical wizardry but also the deeply moving *cantabile* playing for which Paganini was famed. (Franz Schubert maintained that he "heard an angel sing" in Paganini's lyrical moments.) The *Introduction* comprises a somber prelude without soloist and a dramatic *Recitativo* for the viola. The second movement takes as its theme a sweet, double-stop melody in the nature of a Neapolitan love song. The finale works three flamboyant variations and a coda on the jaunty tune presented at the outset.

## MODEST MUSSORGSKY

### *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874)

Transcribed for Orchestra (1923) by Maurice Ravel

Modest Mussorgsky was born in Karevo, Pskov District, Russia on March 21, 1839, and died in St. Petersburg on March 28, 1881. Inspired by a memorial art exhibition for his friend Victor Hartmann, Mussorgsky composed *Pictures at an Exhibition* as a virtuosic piano suite in 1874. While there are many different orchestrations of the suite, Ravel's definitive version was commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky in 1923, and premiere by Koussevitzky at the Paris Opéra on May 3, 1923. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered Ravel's orchestration on December 8, 1939, at Syria Mosque with Fritz Reiner, and most recently performed the work on February 1, 2015, with Krzysztof Urbanski. The score calls for two piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, E-flat alto saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celeste, two harps and strings.

**Performance time: approximately 34 minutes**

In the years around 1850, with the spirit of nationalism sweeping across Europe, several young Russian artists banded together to rid their art of foreign influences in order to establish a distinctive nationalist character for their works. Leading this movement was a group of composers known as "The Five," whose members included Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, César Cui and Mily Balakirev. Among the allies that The Five found in other fields was the artist and architect Victor Hartmann, with whom Mussorgsky became close personal friends. Hartmann's premature death at 39 stunned the composer and the entire Russian artistic community. Vladimir Stassov, a noted critic and the journalistic champion of the Russian arts movement, organized a memorial exhibit of Hartmann's work in February 1874, and it was under the inspiration of that showing that Mussorgsky conceived his *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

At the time of the exhibit, Mussorgsky was engaged in preparations for the first public performance of his opera *Boris Godunov*, and he was unable to devote any time to his *Pictures* until early summer. When he took up the piece in June, he worked with unaccustomed speed. "Hartmann' is bubbling over, just as *Boris* did," he wrote to a friend. "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." The movements mostly depict sketches, watercolors and architectural designs shown publicly at the Hartmann exhibit, though Mussorgsky based two or three sections on canvases that he had been shown privately by the artist before his death. The composer linked his sketches together with a musical "Promenade" in which he depicted his own rotund self shuffling — in an uneven meter — from one picture to the next. Though Mussorgsky was not given to much excitement over his own creations, he took special delight in this one. Especially in the masterful transcription for orchestra that Maurice Ravel did in 1923 for the Parisian concerts of conductor Sergei Koussevitzky, it is a work of vivid impact to which listeners and performers alike can return with undiminished pleasure.

*Promenade*. According to Stassov, this recurring section depicts Mussorgsky "roving through the exhibition, now leisurely, now briskly, and, at times sadly, thinking of his friend." *Gnomus*. Hartmann's drawing is for a fantastic wooden nutcracker representing a gnome who gives off savage shrieks while he waddles about. *Il vecchio castello*. A troubadour sings a doleful lament before a foreboding, ruined ancient fortress. *Tuileries*. Hartmann's picture shows a corner of the famous Parisian garden filled with nursemaids and their youthful charges. *Bydlo*. Hartmann's painting depicts a rugged wagon drawn by oxen. The peasant driver sings a plaintive melody (solo tuba) heard first from afar, then close-by, before the cart passes away into the distance. *Ballet of Chicks in their Shells*. Hartmann's costume design for the 1871 fantasy ballet *Trilby* shows dancers enclosed in enormous egg shells. *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle* was inspired by a pair of pictures depicting two residents of the Warsaw ghetto, one rich and pompous (a weighty unison for strings and winds), the other poor and complaining (muted trumpet). Mussorgsky based both themes on incantations he had heard on visits to Jewish synagogues. *The Marketplace at Limoges*. A lively sketch of a bustling market. *Catacombae - Cum mortuis in lingua mortua*. Hartmann's drawing shows him being led by a guide with a lantern through cavernous underground tombs. The movement's second section, titled "With the Dead in a Dead Language," is a mysterious transformation of the *Promenade* theme. *Baba-Yaga - The Hut on Fowl's Legs*. Hartmann's

sketch is a design for an elaborate clock suggested by Baba Yaga, a fearsome witch of Russian folklore who flies through the air. Mussorgsky's music suggests a wild, midnight ride. *The Great Gate of Kiev* was inspired by Hartmann's plan for a gateway for the city of Kiev in the massive old Russian style crowned with a cupola in the shape of a Slavic warrior's helmet. The majestic music suggests both the imposing bulk of the edifice (never built, incidentally) and a brilliant procession passing through its arches.

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