



Gustav Meier
Music Director
62nd Season
2nd Subscription Concert
Klein Memorial Auditorium
Saturday, November 10, 2007
8:00 p.m.

Gustav Meier, Conductor

PROKOFIEV

Peter and the Wolf, op. 67

Rev. Charles H. Allen, S. J., Narrator

INTERMISSION

STRAVINSKY

Petrushka (1947 version)

Burlesque Scenes in 4 Tableaux

I. *The Shrovetide Fair (Butter Week)*

II. *Petrushka's room*

III. *The Moor's room*

IV. *The Shrovetide Fair (toward evening)*

Rev. Charles H. Allen, S. J., Narrator

Tonight's concert is made possible in part by generous grants from the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism and Mitchells of Westport.

Special thanks to GBS Trustee Rev. Charles H. Allen, S.J. for his narration of tonight's masterworks and to Emy Meier for her "Peter and the Wolf" script, adapted from the traditional version and her synopsis of "Petrushka".

PROGRAM NOTES

Tonight's program is billed as "wondrous musical fairy tales with underlying themes of good and evil" and its Russian composers, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, faced unbelievable pressures on every front. For one, music itself was at a major crossroads; tonality, sound organized in a series around an initial resting point called the tonic, had sufficed in the main for all style periods from the time of Bach and Handel (both b. 1685) until pushed to its limits in the early 20th century. It is much better to be born when a style is fresh, waiting to be exploited: i. e. to be a Bach whose counterpoint helped define tonality ("Bach a German of the great epoch has all my veneration" Stravinsky wrote), a Mozart (b. 1756), alive when reasoned balances, both musical and philosophic, were in place, or a Chopin/Liszt, Schumann etc. (b. 1810-11) who lived when the subjective license of Romanticism was first fully articulated. To be young when a style is waning, as Stravinsky and Prokofiev were, creates a crisis of method and the early 20th century was probably the worst no-man's-land for art in history - one still not totally resolved.

Worse yet for an artist is to have been born when political stability was falling apart across a whole continent. The First World War (1914-1918) was "one of the most horrific watersheds in European history... the long 19th century's optimism and faith in progress were (its) first and most permanent casualties" (Taruskin - Oxford History). When the Russian Revolution in 1917 toppled the Czar and led to the Communist regime, both Stravinsky and Prokofiev realized they would have to leave; for Stravinsky this was permanent exile first in France (1920-1939, - Paris was the art center of the West between World Wars) and then the United States until his death in 1971 (there were many trips to Europe as well, but he did not visit Russia until 1962). Prokofiev left for the United States (1918-1922) and France (1922-1936) before returning to Russia for the rest of his life where he faced the unmerciful pressures from the Soviet regime that beset all artists who wanted independence. He died on the same day as Stalin in 1953 - strange irony!

The rise of Russian composers to importance in the annals of classical music was comparatively meteoric. The first, Glinka (1804-1857), studied Western models in Italy and Berlin, but developed melodic and variation techniques as well as harmonic dissonances and clarity of texture that influenced Russian

students for the rest of the century. This was acknowledged by the 'Mighty Five', one of whose members, Rimsky Korsakov, taught Stravinsky and Prokofiev at the St. Petersburg Conservatory which had opened in 1862, the first in the country, with Tchaikovsky one of its first students. All acknowledged Glinka's place as "father of Russian music." By 1900 Russia had sent to Western Europe ways to make a vastly expanded palette of orchestral color, expand line and introduce the vitality of ethnic melody and rhythm into its established forms.

Of the two Prokofiev remained the more traditional composer. He cited his four main influences as (1) the 'classical' - forms such as sonata and symphony, (2) the 'lyric' - slower for the public to appreciate, (3) the 'motoric' - prominence and drive of rhythm and (4) 'scherziness' - humor, playfulness, but this can also be satiric, sarcastic, demonic. He started out with a reputation as an iconoclast, but is in fact a major creator who helped give the modern age a sense of itself as a changing continuation of the past.

Stravinsky was the more innovative of the two, following and helping in the first two decades of the 20th century to implement the view that rather than being the vehicle for "emotions, feelings, desires, aspirations" (Schloezer) the romantics considered music, it was "an arrangement of tonal masses, sculptured in marble, to be regarded objectively by the ear" (Stravinsky). "In my passport I have purposely put 'inventor and composer of music' as my occupation," he wrote. "Anyone can compose, but he should not build houses in which he cannot live." *Petrushka* was written just before these changes began to be apparent.

Both composers never gave up. "In these last months of his life Prokofiev concentrated all his energies into getting his ideas on paper as soon as possible," his second wife Mira Alexandrovna wrote. Stravinsky listened to "recordings of other composers, especially Beethoven" as his own energy failed. They had lived through a cataclysmic time in the history of the world and their country, but their music has proven, once again, that no political system can successfully squelch or limit the subject matter of an artist for long.

PETER AND THE WOLF

Sergei Prokofiev (1891 - 1953)

"Prokofiev, even more than most artists, remained a child at heart and had an uncanny

insight into how children think and what amuses them,” his first wife, Lina, once remarked (Robinson). On his return to Russia in 1936, he became fascinated by the Moscow Children’s Musical Theater and worked out with its director, Natalia Satz, the scenario for *Peter and the Wolf* which he then proceeded to write the text for and compose in a week. Each character was to be represented by a specific melody and instrument, introducing by this means the orchestra to the young audience, while the story was to be read by a narrator. The list includes: (1) Peter, - the strings (confident rhythm and major intervals), (2) The Grandfather, - the bassoon, (clumsy octave leaps), (3) the bird - flute (brilliant trills and runs), (4) the duck, - the oboe (sliding half steps), (5) the cat - clarinet (sly staccato jumps), (6) the wolf - the brass (dashing fanfare), (7) the hunters - full orchestra (quirky, ironic march).

The plot finds Peter walking in the meadow watching the bird flying, the duck swimming and the cat stalking. His Grandfather calls him back behind the gate, warning that a wolf might appear. Of course, one does and swallows the duck whole. Peter climbs over the wall onto a tree branch. He tells the bird to distract the wolf by flying around its head and drops a lasso over the wolf’s tail, capturing it. Some hunters come out of the woods. Peter persuades them to take the wolf to a zoo and they all form a procession, the Grandfather complaining “Well and if Peter hadn’t caught the wolf? and the duck quacking in the wolf’s stomach.

Peter defied his Grandfather and acted with youthful shrewdness and courage. The cat and the bird, natural enemies, had to become allies. The moral might be “don’t be afraid to challenge established beliefs or to take risks” (Robinson). The work was an instant success and is played the world over. Its apolitical nature is refreshing.

PETRUSHKA (1947 version)

Igor Stravinsky (1882 - 1971)

Diaghilev with his passion for art, acute ability to judge talent organizing skill and awareness of the four-hundred-plus well trained dancers of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theater wondered in the late 1890’s whether “ it would not be possible to create a number of short new ballets that would link music, decorative design and choreography far more closely than ever before” and take them to Europe. Nijinsky and Pavlova were among his first great dancers, Stravinsky the first of his great composers (Prokofiev came later), Fokine, first choreographer and Bakst and Benois, the first set and costume designers. “Our

programs were nothing less than revolutions in art,” he wrote. The first performances were in 1909 in Paris. Stravinsky’s *Firebird* came in 1910 and *Petrushka* a year later.

For *Petrushka* Stravinsky said “I had in my mind a distinct puppet suddenly endowed with life - Petrushka (Harlequin in Italy, Kasperle in Germany, Pierrot in France), the immortal and unhappy hero of every fair in all countries.” Nijinsky, who first danced the role said he “made up in this part as an old traditional Russian figure - the mythical outcast in whom is concentrated the pathos and suffering of life, one who beats his hands against the walls, but is always cheated and left alone outside.” Stravinsky himself said Nijinsky’s interpretation had never been surpassed.

The Shrovetide Fair in St. Petersburg in 1830 is the setting for the Ballet which is in four scenes. There are four main roles; the Magician and the puppets, Petrushka, the Moor and the Ballerina.

I. A sunny wintry day. The crowd includes common people, gentlemen and ladies, drunkards arm in arm, and children. An organ grinder and dancer perform while across the stage a music box and dancer do the same. Two drummers appear and their drum rolls quiet the crowd as the theater curtains open and the magician playing his flute brings his puppets to life. To the astonishment of the crowd, they come off the stage to perform the Russian Dance.

II. Petrushka’s bare room with a menacing portrait of the magician on the wall. He loves the Ballerina, but she spurns him for his awkwardness. He curses the Magician for giving him feelings but an ugly appearance.

III. The Moor’s opulent room. The Ballerina is smitten by him. Petrushka interrupts their tryst and is thrown out.

IV. Toward evening the Fair is in full swing. Suddenly Petrushka runs out of the theater pursued by the Moor who kills him with a blow from a scimitar. The Ballerina and the Moor run off. The crowd disperses as the Magician picks up the lifeless Petrushka, after all only filled with sawdust. But the ghost of the puppet appears above the theater. Stravinsky thought of this image as “the real Petrushka, his gestures a nose-thumbing addressed to the audience.”

The music brilliantly suggests all this activity. Few ballet scores can stand on their own separate from the dance, but *Petrushka* is one of them. Its constantly shifting rhythm, a 20th century characteristic, was a trial for the dancers to learn.

-Burton Hatheway