

András Keller conducts the Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Friday, April 26, 2019 at 8:00pm

Prelude Recital at 6:45pm

Pre-concert Talk at 7:15pm

This is the 934th concert in Koerner Hall

Linda Ruan, piano

András Keller, conductor

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

PROGRAM

Dimitri Shostakovich: Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Major, op. 102

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky: *Francesca da Rimini*, op. 32

INTERMISSION

Igor Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring*

Part 1: The Adoration of the Earth

Introduction – Auguries of Spring (Dances of the Young Girls) – Mock Abduction – Spring Khorovod (Round-Dances) – Games of the Rival Clans – Procession of the Sage – Adoration of the Earth (The Sage) – Dance of the Earth

Part 2: The Sacrifice

Introduction – Mystical Circles of the Young Girls – Glorification of the Chosen One – The Summoning of the Ancients – Ritual of the Ancients – Sacrificial Dance of the Chosen One

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, September 12/25, 1906; died in Moscow, Russia, August 9, 1975

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Major, op. 102 (1957)

As a student in Leningrad and Moscow, Shostakovich was a precocious pianist. His fellow students tell tales of his wit and humour at the keyboard, particularly when those in authority expected a more conservative, conformist approach. Playing piano for silent movies also gave the young musician an outlet for his skill in improvisation. It was a difficult time, following the death of his father early in 1922, a debilitating attack of tuberculosis the following year, and family privations in the wake of the Revolution and civil war. Shostakovich continued as a pianist, making concert tours until 1958. In tonight's Piano Concerto, a relatively late work, his keyboard writing remains far from conventional. He favours the bright, brittle sounds of the high register, often giving both hands the same melody, an octave or two apart. He tends towards percussive, catchy rhythms that are bright and exuberant in impact. Although the concerto was composed in 1957 when he had turned 50, there is much in it that harkens back to the relatively carefree times of his youth.

Stalin was now dead. Shostakovich had composed his eloquent and searching Tenth Symphony in the relative thaw that followed. Two years before he began work on the concerto, his first wife, Nina Vasilyevna Varzar, died suddenly and his mother died shortly afterwards. Shostakovich, never a practical man about the house, now had to cope with two children at a crucial stage of their youth. His daughter Galina was soon to enrol at the biology faculty at Moscow University. His son Maxim was an aspiring pianist. Shostakovich wrote the concerto for Maxim, who gave the premiere on the day of his 19th birthday and gained his entrance qualification to the Moscow Conservatory with

the work. The concerto is full of the spirit of youth. Its cheeky opening theme has fun with echoes of all those keyboard studies a young student has to get their fingers around – chromatic scales, octaves, arpeggios, repeated notes, parallel chords and the like. The writing is highly effective, frequently brilliant, without posing great technical challenges.

The slow movement is a dreamy nocturne à la Rachmaninov, mostly scored for muted strings and piano. Shostakovich just succeeds in keeping this generously sentimental music from going over the top with a hint of self-mockery. The finale returns to the high jinks of the opening. Its main theme makes a virtue out of being stuck on one note. A second theme, no less jaunty, exploits a spiky seven-beat rhythm. Immediately after it has run its course, we get a passage familiar to most piano students, an imitative-Hanon upward rising, five-finger exercise. The exuberance and high spirits continue to the end.

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, April 25/May 7, 1840; died in St. Petersburg, Russia, October 25/November 6, 1893

Francesca da Rimini, op. 32 (1876)

“There is no greater pain than to recall past joy in present hell,” are lines from Canto V of Dante’s *Inferno*, as Francesca da Rimini begins her tale. As he read these lines and re-read them on a train to Paris in the summer of 1876, Tchaikovsky turned a blind eye to earlier pages in Dante’s epic poem telling of such legendary lovers as Cleopatra, Dido, Helen of Troy, Achilles, and Tristan. Instead, he found Francesca’s death and subsequent suffering for having loved her husband’s brother the most compelling to both his own frame of mind and his creative needs. He was, he wrote, ‘inflamed’ with a desire to write a symphonic fantasia on *Francesca*. Just three weeks of intense composition and a further three weeks of orchestration was all it took the 36-year-old Tchaikovsky to portray the bleak disparity between passionate illicit love and the inevitable tortuous suffering that ensues – life experiences by which the composer was himself deeply tormented. The musical language of *Francesca* is somewhat coloured by Tchaikovsky’s visit to the first complete performance of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth. While his articles for a Russian newspaper were respectful and his private correspondence frank (‘murderously boring’), the ominous chords that open the symphonic fantasia portray an inferno to whose darkness Wagner was no stranger. The three-chord motif recurs in later sections of the three sections of the fantasy. Its forbidding Andante lugubre introduction leads to a tumultuous Allegro vivo in which Dante enters Hell’s second circle. Here, in a whirlwind of orchestral virtuosity, Dante encounters the “raging tempests in eternal darkness” of souls whose sensual lust condemned them to such punishment. As the intensity rises and subsides, the shade of Francesca emerges to a poignantly lyrical clarinet solo of a starkly different character. Now veiled and more intimate, the theme is prolonged on muted strings and gradually taken up by the entire orchestra. As the love between Francesca and her brother-in-law Paolo grows in intensity, an additional theme is introduced by the cor anglais, with harp. Eventually, and inevitably, Dante and his doomed lovers are pulled back into the terrifying storm and the turmoil of Hades.

Igor Stravinsky

Born in Oranienbaum [now Lomonosov], nr. St. Petersburg, Russia, June 5/17, 1882; died in New York, New York, April 6, 1971

The Rite of Spring (1911-13)

A little over a century ago, in a city still known for its protests, Paris was the scene of what has been widely referred to as the most notorious riot in Western music history. On May 29, 1913, as the music to *The Rite of Spring* played, audience members shouted at the musicians, at the dancers, at the creators, at one another. Its composer, Igor Stravinsky, joined choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky in the wings, beating and shouting out its complex rhythms to the dancers over the audience rumpus. Even after an unprecedented 17 rehearsals, the dancers had trouble with Stravinsky’s irregular rhythms, with dancing flat-footed, and with standing knock-kneed as ancient peoples. When impresario Serge Diaghilev, founder of the Ballets Russes, ordered the lights flicked off and on during the performance to try to calm the row, the atmosphere became even more charged – much to his delight. The premiere made front-page news the following day. One of the most powerful and seminal scores of the last century was born.

As early as 1910, the work's stage designer Nicholas Roerich drafted a ballet called *Supreme Sacrifice*. The primitivism of the scenario awakened something elemental in Stravinsky, who then brought Diaghilev into the picture. He seized on folk music as the raw material of the score, transforming it into something altogether new. His sketchbook for *The Rite* contains folk themes from many sources, the best known being the opening bassoon solo (from a collection of 1,785 Lithuanian folk songs gathered by a Polish priest). From these folk songs and from other sources, including stage works by composers such as his own teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky drew fragments and rhythmic patterns. He developed driving, ostinato rhythms, adding a series of irregular accents, dislocating the metre, and making the entire sound hypnotic in the process. He composed, as usual, at the piano where he was able to experiment with chords, superimposing, for example, one consonant black-note chord in the left hand with another white-note consonant chord in the right – but one step apart, thereby producing a harsh dissonance. For Stravinsky, composition was normally a cerebral process. But with this ballet, he abandoned himself to his instinct. "I was the vessel through which *The Rite* flowed," he famously said. As for that initial riot, which soon grew to widespread acclaim for the score, Roerich had this to say: "Who knows, perhaps at that moment they were inwardly exultant and expressing this feeling like the most primitive of peoples."

- Program notes © 2019 Keith Horner

Linda Ruan

Piano

Named one of *CBC's* "Hot 30 under 30 Classical Musicians" in 2017, Canadian pianist Linda Ruan has performed in some of the world's most prestigious venues, from Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York to the Xinghai Philharmonic Hall in China.

Notable performances from the past seasons include orchestral appearances with the Vancouver Metropolitan Orchestra, Royal Conservatory Orchestra, Oakville Chamber Orchestra, and the Xinghai Philharmonic Orchestra; and solo performances in North America, Asia, and Europe. She was featured as soloist for Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto in a benefit concert for the Vancouver Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, which raised over \$3,000.

Ms. Ruan has been a prizewinner in the PianoArts North American Piano Competition, CMFTA National Piano Competition, and the Seattle International Piano Competition. During summers, she took part in the Yellowbarn Young Artist Program, Banff Chamber Music Residency and Piano Masterclasses, Morningside Music Bridge, and the Holland International Music Sessions. Furthermore, she has worked in masterclasses with Leon Fleisher, Maxim Vengerov, and Wenzel Fuchs, among many others.

In addition to her solo career, she formed La Fiammata Piano Duo, who were the winners of the 2018 Northwest International Piano Ensemble Competition and the 2017 Canadian Music Competition Grand Prix.

Born in Tokyo, Linda Ruan began learning the piano at the age of seven in Shanghai, China. As the recipient of the Colleen Sexsmith Piano Scholarship, she is currently studying at The Glenn Gould School under the tutelage of Mr. James Anagnoson and Mr. Li Wang.

András Keller

Conductor

András Keller has enjoyed a varied career as a soloist, concertmaster, and chamber musician at the highest international level. He founded the Keller String Quartet in 1987 and has since given masterclasses and concerts throughout the world. As both chamber musician and soloist, he has appeared in every European country, and has been invited to Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Library of Congress, and many cities in Japan, China, and Korea. During his career, he has worked with world-renowned artists including Mstislav Rostropovich, Tabea Zimmerman, Truls Mørk, Zoltán Kocsis, Miklós Perényi, Gidon Kremer, Kim Kashkashian, Evgeni Koroliov, Boris Berezovsky, Juliane Banse, Vadim Repin, and Isabelle Faust.

He is the recipient of the Premio Franco Abbiati, Liszt Prize, and Bartók-Pásztory Prize. He was named an Artist of Merit of Hungary, and his recordings have been awarded numerous international prizes and awards.

András Keller is the Artistic Director of the Arcus Temporum Festival in Pannonhalma. In 2007, he was appointed as Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of Concerto Budapest Symphony Orchestra. Under his leadership,

Concerto Budapest has earned a reputation as one of the most respected Hungarian orchestras, annually presenting over 60 concerts in Budapest, in addition to international concerts and festival appearances.

He teaches annually at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, is a regular guest of the International Musicians Seminar Prussia Cove, and, in 2018, he attended the Verbier Festival as a guest professor. Since 2016, he has been teaching at the violin faculty of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, which also appointed him as Béla Bartók International Chair in 2018.

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Joaquin Valdepeñas, Resident Conductor

The Royal Conservatory Orchestra (RCO), part of the Temerty Orchestral Program, is widely regarded as an outstanding ensemble and one of the best training orchestras in North America. Through the RBC Guest Conductor Program, four renowned conductors work with the RCO each season, allowing GGS students to gain experience through professional rehearsal and performance conditions. The week culminates in a Koerner Hall performance under the batons of such distinguished guest conductors as Johannes Debus, András Keller, Gábor Takács-Nagy, and Bramwell Tovey, who lead the RCO this season. Past guest conductors have included Ihnatowycz Chair in Piano Leon Fleisher, Sir Roger Norrington, Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw, Nathan Brock, Julian Kuerti, Uri Mayer, Tania Miller, Tito Muñoz, Peter Oundjian, Ivars Taurins, and Lior Shambadal. The RCO ensures that instrumental students in the Bachelor of Music and the Artist Diploma Program of The Glenn Gould School graduate with extensive orchestral performance experience. Additionally, winners of The Glenn Gould School Concerto Competition have the opportunity to appear each year as soloists with the RCO. Graduates of the RCO have joined the ranks of the greatest orchestras in the world, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the BBC Orchestra, the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, Tafelmusik, the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus. The RCO has been heard repeatedly on the national broadcasts of the CBC Radio, has been invited to perform at the Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre in Kingston, and toured China during the 2004-05 season.

