

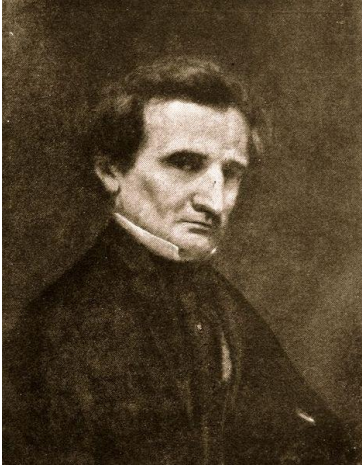
American Philharmonic – Sonoma County

Program notes for 2011-2012 Season

February 5, 2012 - *The Grand Tour*

Le Corsaire (The Pirate)

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)



Berlioz's father was a doctor, who intended for Hector to become a doctor in spite of his obvious musical talent. But Hector had his own ideas. Berlioz was confident of his skills from a very young age; he wrote to a music publisher at age 15 to have some of his works published. He played the flute and flageolet but never learned piano, and was proud not to be dependent on it. At the age of 16 he started his medical studies, which took him to Paris two years later. He completed a Bachelor of Science degree in 1824, but he had been working on music all the while. The influences he found in Paris made it too difficult to keep up the pretense of interest in medicine. He decided to dedicate himself to music that same year.

Berlioz wrote the overture *Le Corsaire* in 1831, revising it twice and changing the name twice by 1855. It was inspired by, among other things, his first visit to Italy, during which his boat almost sank in a storm, and a fascinating encounter with a boasting pirate. The music itself is as dramatic as a stormy sea voyage.

Symphony No. 5: Movement 4, Adagietto

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Gustav Mahler was born in Bohemia and lived most of his life in Austria. He had a difficult life from the beginning. His brutal father treated his delicate mother badly. Seven of Gustav's thirteen siblings died in childhood, one after a long illness with Gustav attending and telling stories to the end. As a boy he was a moody, introspective daydreamer. As a conservatory student he was very successful, winning piano and composition prizes. But he was preoccupied with the riddle of existence with its cruelty, pain, and death.

He was a consummate, tyrannical conductor, striving ruthlessly for perfection and showing indifference to personal considerations, including his own. His symphonies are built of long and beautiful song-like melodies that encompass a huge range of emotions. The heart-rending sensitivity of the short (for Mahler) adagietto from the fifth symphony stands out among his works for its expressiveness.

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Rachmaninoff was born into wealth, but his father gambled away most of the estate. Rachmaninoff entered the Moscow Conservatory at the age of 12. In the beginning, he depended on his superior innate talent rather than hard work and scholarship to stay ahead. But in 1885 he began working with the piano teacher Zvereff, who helped him gain discipline and focus. During the next four years, living and studying with the professor, he met Tchaikovsky and other great Russian musicians. Rachmaninoff was an extraordinarily gifted pianist, tall and thin with very large hands.



After years of exile during which he supported himself mostly by playing piano concerts, Rachmaninoff's composing productivity had suffered. But in 1934, he composed the Rhapsody based on the last of Paganini's 24 Caprices for violin. During the course of 24 variations, the piano and orchestra play with and against each other in a rainbow of different moods, quoting the Dies Irae several times. In variation 18, he inverts the theme and gives us a sunny respite to the otherwise solemn and fierce playing.

Toccata for Orchestra

Kurt Erickson

A native Californian, Kurt Erickson has studied music at CSU Fresno, University of Notre Dame, and Mills College. He has had pieces performed by a variety of universities and arts organization, many of them in the Bay Area. During the 2010-11 season he will be a Featured Composer at both the Festival of New American Music at California State Sacramento and at the New Music Festival at California State University Fresno. He has served as composer in residence with the Minnesota Orchestra, which commissioned this piece. The toccata was originally a keyboard piece in free, improvisational style that included running scales and large chords, made most famous by Bach.

The Toccatina for Orchestra is a breathlessly driving celebration of rhythmic interplay. A perpetual motion undercurrent carries the listener along as soloists and sections join and leave the flow.

The Three-Cornered Hat

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)

Falla's youthful ambition to be a composer was strong, but his desire to study in Paris took a while to achieve. His first few compositions met with no public success. But a few years of studying composition with the idealist Pedrell set him on the right path. His work, *La Vida Breve*, won a composition prize, and then he won a piano performance competition. By 1907, he could finally afford to go to Paris. Planning to go for seven days, he stayed for seven years. There he became friends with the French luminaries of the day: Dukas, Ravel, Debussy. His success was assured.

The great and flamboyant Russian impresario Diaghilev wanted to create a ballet based on Falla's piano concerto, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. Falla convinced him to use *El Sombrero Tres Picos* instead. Excerpts of the music from *The Three-Cornered Hat* are occasionally played by orchestras or in transcription for guitar, but the complete ballet rarely appears.



The story is in two acts. Falla describes stage actions on stage as diverse as the creaking well-bucket pulley and the waddling step of a foolish old politician with uncommon artistry. In Act I, the lives of the miller and his lovely wife are interrupted by the appearance of the corregidor, a slightly ridiculous official whose grotesque three-cornered hat is a symbol of office. He looks admiringly at the miller's wife, who proceeds to tease and humiliate him. He leaves, vowing to return. In Act II, he has the miller arrested and comes to visit the miller's wife again, dressed as the miller. She rebuffs him, pointing the miller's gun at him. Later, the miller, who has escaped from jail, and is

dressed for the occasion as the corregidor, falls upon the real corregidor. The act ends with the hapless corregidor receiving his just deserts for intruding upon the lives of the miller and his wife.

Notes by R. M. Teplitz