

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTIETH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, January 20, 2011, at 8:00

Saturday, January 22, 2011, at 8:00

Sir John Eliot Gardiner Conductor

Stravinsky

Symphony in Three Movements

$\text{♩} = 160$

Andante—Interlude: *Listesso tempo*—

Con moto

Elgar

In the South (Alassio), Op. 50

INTERMISSION

Bartók

Concerto for Orchestra

Introduzione: *Andante non troppo*—*Allegro vivace*

Giuoco delle coppie: *Allegro scherzando*

Elegia: *Andante non troppo*

Intermezzo interrotto: *Allegretto*

Finale: *Presto*

Steinway is the official piano of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

This program is partially supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Igor Stravinsky

Born June 18, 1882, Oranienbaum, Russia.

Died April 6, 1971, New York City.

Symphony in Three Movements

No composer has given us more perspectives on a “symphony” than Stravinsky. He wrote a symphony at the very beginning of his career (it’s his op. 1), but Stravinsky quickly became famous as the composer of three ballet scores (*Petrushka*, *The Firebird*, and *The Rite of Spring*), and he spent the next few years composing for the theater and the opera house. When, in 1920, he finally returned to writing music for an orchestra on the concert stage, he composed the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, which isn’t a symphony in the classical sense of the word. (Stravinsky intentionally uses the plural, alluding to the original meaning of the word, which implies instruments sounding together.)

With the *Symphony of Psalms*, his great choral work of 1930,

Stravinsky is again playing word games. (And, perhaps, as has been suggested, he used the term partly to placate his publisher, who reminded him, after the score was finished, that he had been commissioned to write a symphony.) Then, at last, a true symphony: in 1938, Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, together with Mrs. John Alden Carpenter and several of her friends in Chicago, asked Stravinsky to compose something to honor the fiftieth anniversary of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the 1940–41 season. To celebrate a milestone in the life of a great American orchestra, Stravinsky decided to tackle the “standard” by writing a symphony in C in the four orthodox movements, scored for a Beethoven orchestra.

COMPOSED

1942–August 7, 1945

FIRST PERFORMANCE

January 24, 1946; New York City, the composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

November 17, 1960; Orchestra Hall; Hans Rosbaud conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

March 3, 2009; Orchestra Hall; Pierre Boulez conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, three clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba,

timpani, bass drum, piano, harp, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

22 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1993, Sir Georg Solti conducting, London

2009, Pierre Boulez conducting, CSO Resound

Two years later, Stravinsky began sketches for this Symphony in Three Movements—his final essay on what a symphony can mean. (From time to time he regretted not having called it simply Three Symphonic Movements.) In the Symphony in C, Stravinsky had enjoyed masquerading as Haydn, but the new Symphony in Three Movements is much more a work of its own time.

In a program note written for the premiere in 1946, Stravinsky asserted that the symphony was absolute music, although touched “by this arduous time of sharp and shifting events, of despair and hope, of continual torments, of tension, and, at last, cessation and relief.” Two years later, he wrote a letter to the composer Ingolf Dahl insisting that “if passages from the program notes are used to imply extramusical connotations in my work, I have to disclaim any responsibility for such interpretations.” This was characteristic Stravinsky, and even though the composer’s followers had heard words to this effect time and time again, they always suspected there was more to the story. Finally, in *Dialogues and A Diary*, published in 1963, Stravinsky wrote openly about the genesis of the symphony. Those comments follow.

Igor Stravinsky on the Symphony in Three Movements

The symphony was written under the impression of world events.

I will not say that it expresses my feeling about them, but only that, without participation of what I think of as my will, they excited my musical imagination. And the impressions that activated me were not general, or ideological, but specific: each episode in the symphony is linked in my imagination with a specific cinematographic impression of war.

The third movement even contains the genesis of a war plot, though I accepted it as such only after the composition was completed. The beginning of the movement is partly and in some inexplicable way a musical reaction to the newsreels and documentaries I had seen of goose-stepping soldiers. The square march beat, the brass-band instrumentation, the grotesque crescendo in the tuba—these are all related to those abhorrent pictures.

Though what I call my impressions of world events were derived almost entirely from films, the root of my indignation was a personal experience. One day, in Munich, in 1932, I saw a squad of Brown Shirts enter the street below the balcony of my room in the Bayerischer Hof and assault a group of civilians. The latter tried to defend themselves with street benches, but they were soon crushed beneath these clumsy shields. The police eventually arrived, of course, but the attackers had all dispersed. That same night I went with Vera de Bosset and the photographer Eric Schall to a small Allée restaurant. As we dined, a gang in swastika armbands entered the room. One of them began to talk insultingly about Jews and to

aim his remarks in our direction. With the afternoon street fight still in our eyes, we hurried to leave, but the now-shouting Nazi and his myrmidons followed, cursing



Sergei Soudeikine's portrait of Vera de Bosset, who became Stravinsky's second wife

and threaten-
ing us the
while. Schall
protested, and
at that they
began to kick
and to hit
him. Miss de
Bosset ran to a
corner, found
a policeman,
and told him
a man was
being killed,
but this
information
did not arouse

him to any action. We were rescued by a timely taxi and though Schall was battered and bloody, we went directly to a Police Court. The magistrate was as little perturbed with our story, however, as the policeman had been. "In Germany today, such things happen every minute," was all he said.

But to return to the plot of the movement, in spite of contrasting episodes such as the canon for bassoons, the march music predominates until the fugue which is the stasis and the turning point. The immobility at the beginning of this fugue is comic, I think—and so, to me, was the overturned arrogance of the Germans when their machine failed. The exposition of the fugue and the end of the symphony are associated in my plot with the rise of the Allies, and

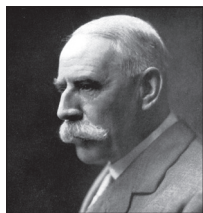
the final, rather too commercial, D-flat sixth chord—instead of the expected C—in some way tokens my extra exuberance in the Allied triumph. The figure



was developed from the rumba in the timpani part in the introduction to the first movement. It is somehow, inexplicably, associated in my imagination with the movements of war machines.

The first movement was likewise inspired by a war film, this time of scorched earth tactics in China. The middle part of the movement was conceived as a series of instrumental conversations to accompany a series of cinematographic scenes showing the Chinese people scratching and digging in their fields. The music for clarinet, piano, and strings that mounts in intensity and volume until the explosion of the three chords . . . , and that then begins all over again, was all associated in my mind with this Chinese documentary.

The formal substance of the symphony—"Three Symphonic Movements" would be a more exact title—exploits the idea of counterplay between several types of contrasting elements. One such contrast, the most obvious, is that of harp and piano, the principal instrumental protagonists. Each has a large obbligato role and a whole movement to itself and only at the turning-point fugue, the Nazi *queue de poisson*, are the two heard together and alone. ■



Edward Elgar

Born June 2, 1857, Broadheath, near Worcester, England.

Died February 23, 1934, Worcester, England.

In the South (Alassio), Op. 50

When Henry James toured Italy in the 1870s, he encountered hoards of “grave English people who looked respectable and bored.” Three decades later, when Edward Elgar went to the Italian Riviera, craving sunshine and relaxation, he discovered the roads “full of English nursery maids and old English women and children.” He quickly abandoned his first stop, in tourist-clogged Bordighera, just across the French border, finding it “lovely but too cockney for me,” and moved on to Alassio, farther along the coast in the direction of Genoa. “This place is jolly,” he wrote, “real Italian & no nursemaids calling out ‘Now Master Johnny!’” Although Alassio did not provide the cloudless skies Elgar sought, he discovered the true Italy that has long intoxicated travelers. “What matter

the Mediterranean being rough & grey? Who cares for gales? . . . We have such meals! Such wine! *Gosh!* We are at last living a life.”

Elgar had gone to Italy in December 1903 not to escape the damp and cold of an English winter, but to regain his strength and inspiration after the exhausting work of finishing *The Apostles* and to begin his first symphony. He failed on all three counts. Several days into their stay in Alassio, his wife Alice wrote in her diary, “Still cold & grey & windy—E. and A. much depressed at these conditions & wondering if they will not pack up & go home. E. feeling no inspiration for writing.” Edward himself wrote to his dear friend Alfred Jaeger (immortalized in the magnificent and moving “Nimrod” music in the *Enigma Variations*):

COMPOSED

1903–February 21, 1904

FIRST PERFORMANCE

March 16, 1904; London, the composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

November 4, 1904; Auditorium Theater; Theodore Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

March 28, 2000; Orchestra Hall; Mark Elder conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contra-bassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, bass

drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, glockenspiel, two harps, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

19 minutes

"This visit has been, is, artistically a complete *failure* & I can do nothing. The symphony will not be written in this sunny (?) land."

But the essence of Italian life affected Elgar, despite the cold and the gales and swarms of mosquitoes as annoying as the tourist crowds. In Alassio, he began a concert overture, in place of the promised symphony, that is perhaps his sunniest and most energized work. It depicts the Italian holiday that largely eluded him, and it is music that Elgar never would have written at home in England, for even a dispiriting stay in Italy offered glimpses of life's greatest pleasures. In his manuscript, he wrote this passage from Tennyson's *The Daisy*:

What hours were thine
and mine
In lands of palm and
southern pine
In lands of palm, of
orange-blossom
Of olive, aloe, and maise
and vine

And from Byron's *Childe Harold*:

. . . a land
Which *was* the mightiest in its
old command
And *is* the loveliest . . .
Wherein were cast . . .
. . . the men of Rome!
Thou art the garden of
the world.

Although Elgar called *In the South* a concert overture, it's really a tone poem—his largest orchestral movement at the time—of weighty

dimensions and electric colors. Elgar may have sidestepped that term to avoid comparison with the new tone poems by Richard Strauss (at the time of the premiere he asked that the program notes not mention Strauss's name), for much about Elgar's overture recalls the style, substance, and sheer orchestral splendor of Strauss. These two composers were kindred spirits in many ways, and their artistic outlooks were never more closely aligned than in the early years of the twentieth century. When Strauss heard a performance of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* in 1902, he proposed a toast to "the first English progressivist, Meister Edward Elgar," and remained Elgar's friend for life. *In the South* begins with a rapid unfurling of a large orchestral chord, very like the opening of Strauss's *Don Juan* (which Elgar admired), followed by the kind of dancing horns Strauss had already made famous.

The precise idea for *In the South* came to Elgar during an afternoon stroll near Alassio. "I was by the side of an old Roman way. A peasant stood by an old ruin, and in a flash it all came to me—the conflict of armies in that very spot long ago, where now I stood—the contrast of the ruin and the shepherd." In a letter to Percy Pitt, who wrote the program note for the premiere, Elgar marked his initial theme "Joy of Life (wine & macaroni)," but, in fact, it's an idea he had sketched several years before, depicting Dan, a friend's bulldog, "triumphant (after a fight)." (Dan

is officially memorialized in the eleventh of the *Enigma* Variations, when he falls into the river Wye, paddles upstream, and reaches the shore with a victorious bark.) The rest of *In the South*, however, leaves England far behind, beginning with the reflective shepherd's music that soon follows, with, as the composer told Pitt, "romance creeping into the picture." Elgar lingers in this relaxed and genial mood for some time until the music moves into a forceful and determined passage marked *grandioso*. There he writes two more lines from Tennyson into his manuscript:

What Roman strength
Turbia show'd
In ruin, by the mountain road

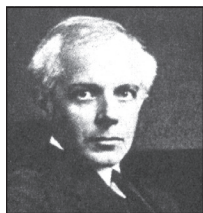
Here, and in the uncharacteristically dissonant pages that follow, Elgar recalls "the strife and wars, the 'drums and trappings' of a later time." This gives way to a delicate *canto popolare* first sung by the solo viola—an unidentified popular song that Elgar eventually confessed he had written himself. He later turned this lovely music into a real song, taking words from a poem by Shelley, "An Ariette

for Music" (he begins at the line, "As the moon's soft splendour"). With this little song—titled "In



Alassio, on the gulf of Genoa, where Edward and Alice Elgar vacationed

Moonlight"—Elgar returns to the shores of the Mediterranean, for it was there, on the curving coast not far from Alassio, that Shelley spent the last months of his short life. When Henry James made his pilgrimage to Shelley's house, he wrote, "I can fancy a great lyric poet sitting on the terrace of a warm evening and feeling very far from England." Elgar's own final pages say the same thing, in music of warmly melodic and life-loving exuberance. ■



Béla Bartók

Born March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Transylvania
(now part of Romania).

Died September 26, 1945, New York City.

Concerto for Orchestra

For all the prestige his music commands today among American orchestras, Béla Bartók was unhappy and largely ignored during the last four years of his life, which he spent in this country. The sad departure from his native Hungary, in late 1940, to escape the Nazi invasion, was a nightmare itself for both Bartók and his wife Ditta, with a furtive night-train trip through Italy to Switzerland, passage by bus through France, a merciless customs inspection at the Spanish border, a night spent wandering through Lisbon in search of a place to sleep, and, finally, a rough crossing on an American cargo ship, with all luggage left behind. The first weeks in New York were

little better—the English language was a minefield, and home was now a spartan hotel room. The Bartóks were perplexed by American ways, like eating cracked wheat for breakfast, and they were dumbfounded by a subway system so vast they once spent three hours wandering underground before they emerged, shamefaced, into the sunlight.

Bartók complained of “creative impotence,” and, in truth, he wrote nothing of substance during his first two years here. He played a few scattered concerts, including a duo-recital with his wife in Chicago that got very bad reviews—one “as bad as I never got in my life,” according to the composer, his mastery of our tongue

COMPOSED

August 15–October 8, 1943

FIRST PERFORMANCE

December 1, 1944

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

December 2, 1948;
Orchestra Hall; George Szell conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCE

October 2, 2009; Orchestra Hall; Paavo Järvi conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and piccolo, three oboes and english horn, three clarinets and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, side drum, bass drum, tam-tam, cymbals, triangle, two harps, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

35 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1955, Fritz Reiner conducting, RCA

1969, Seiji Ozawa conducting, Angel

1981, Sir Georg Solti conducting, London

1989, James Levine conducting, Deutsche Grammophon

1992, Pierre Boulez conducting, Deutsche Grammophon

still as uncertain as his verdict on life in America. In April 1942, Bartók's health took a turn for the worse; several medical examinations proved inconclusive. There were good days and bad, periods of high fever, occasional hospital stays. Pain in his joints made walking difficult. It was, truly, the beginning of the end.

And then, like the miracle great music always is, a masterpiece was born. In May 1943, Serge Koussevitzky, music director of the Boston Symphony, visited Bartók in his hospital room, prepared to write a check for \$500, half payment for an orchestral piece he wished to commission in memory of his late wife Olga. Bartók was reluctant, fearing he wouldn't be able to complete the work, but he finally accepted the offer—and Koussevitzky's check. Had Bartók known the truth, he never would have agreed. The suggestion for the commission had not come directly from Koussevitzky (never a champion of Bartók before), but from Joseph Szigeti and Fritz Reiner, who greatly admired Bartók's music and knew him well enough to know that he would refuse any effort he viewed as charity.

The Bartóks spent the summer at Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks. At first, Bartók busied himself prowling around the local library—he read an English translation of *Don Quixote* with no apparent difficulty. By mid-August, he was ready to put pen to paper, and found to his surprise that he was working “practically day and night” on the Koussevitzky commission.

At least temporarily, his health improved, and when he returned to New York in October, he took the finished score with him. “Perhaps it is due to this improvement,” he had written to Szigeti “(or it may be the other way around) that I have been able to finish the work that Koussevitzky commissioned.” Koussevitzky, who conducted the first performance with the Boston Symphony in December 1944, called the Concerto for Orchestra “the best orchestral piece of the last



With Fritz Reiner, a former pupil and one of Bartók's most dedicated champions in the U.S. (and CSO music director from 1953 to 1963)

twenty-five years,” an assessment few were to challenge.

A word about Bartók's title, Concerto for Orchestra. Bartók's work wasn't the first, but only the most celebrated example to bear this seemingly paradoxical title, which focuses the spotlight not on one solo instrument, but on the orchestra itself. Hindemith, Walter Piston, and Bartók's fellow Hungarian—and dear friend—Zoltán Kodály had written



**Bartók and his second wife,
Ditta Pásztory**

concertos for orchestra before him, just as Michael Tippett, Elliott Carter, and Shulamit Ran would after his great success. The concerto for orchestra is a particularly twentieth-century idea—

a reflection of the unprecedented virtuosity of the modern orchestra and of the desire to pour new wine into old bottles.

With no traditional form to follow, Bartók picked one he often favored: a symmetrical, mirror-like arrangement of five movements, with a large, dark-hued *andante* at the center; light, quicker interludes on either side; and a powerful fast movement to anchor each end. The first sounds we hear are full of mystery and gloom, which don't begin to suggest the sunlight, dancing, and outright humor that are right around the corner. The tone of both the opening movement and the central *Elegia* is stern, even tragic. The second and fourth movements will disrupt the mood, but only the life-asserting finale can dispel it.

The *Giuoco delle coppie* is one of Bartók's most celebrated creations, in which pairs [*coppie*] of instruments take turns presenting an unprepossessing little tune launched by two bassoons at the interval of the sixth, and followed

by oboes in thirds, clarinets in sevenths, flutes in fifths, and muted trumpets in major seconds. The *Elegia* for Olga Koussevitzky is, in Bartók's words, a "lugubrious death-song." It's also a prime example of the composer's "night music," full of haunting, evocative sounds, and, ultimately, a deep calm.

The *Intermezzo interrotto* is exactly that—an interrupted intermezzo—the disruption being the march tune of Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony. Bartók first heard the symphony on the radio in Saranac Lake and thought the marching theme so banal he couldn't resist saying so—in music that dissects the tune and then holds it up to the ridicule of the entire orchestra. It's also worth remembering that Bartók had long questioned Koussevitzky's championship of Shostakovich's music at the neglect of his own. Bartók wasn't a vindictive or mean-spirited man, but surely he enjoyed having the last laugh. The finale is dance music, brilliant and lively—especially in its *perpetuum mobile* sections—based on a straightforward, singable tune and constructed with the contrapuntal dexterity of a master craftsman. It is, above all, a life-affirming statement from a man close to death.

Bartók attended the triumphant premiere of the *Concerto for Orchestra* in December 1944, perhaps detecting the first signs of a new wave of enthusiasm for his music. In the remaining months of his life, he completed all but the last few measures of the *Third Piano Concerto*. He left a viola

concerto commissioned by William Primrose in a pile of sketches (later reconstructed by Tibor Serly). Bartók was unable to begin a seventh string quartet commissioned by Ralph Hawkes.

Bartók died in West Side Hospital, in New York City, in September 1945; he was buried, without ceremony or speeches, in Ferncliff Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York. His widow Ditta moved back to Budapest the following

year and continued to play recitals of her husband's music. She died in November 1982. In July 1988, the remains of Béla Bartók were returned to his native Hungary for a state burial. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Symphony Center Information



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Latecomers will be seated during designated program pauses.



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