

**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

**Bank of America**   
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Friday, April 8, 2011, at 1:30

**Riccardo Muti** Conductor

**Cherubini**

Overture in G Major

First Chicago Symphony Orchestra performances

**Liszt**

*Les préludes*

**INTERMISSION**

**Shostakovich**

Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, Op. 47

Moderato—Allegro non troppo—Largamente

Allegretto

Largo

Allegro non troppo—Allegro

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**Maestro Muti's 2011 Spring Residency is supported in part by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.**

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.

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## Luigi Cherubini

Born September 14, 1760, Florence, Italy.

Died March 15, 1842, Paris, France.

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### Overture in G Major

In 1841, the year before he died, Luigi Cherubini had his portrait painted by his close friend, the popular neoclassical artist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. The painting now hangs in the Louvre, where it is admired by millions of visitors each year; it has become the lasting image of a major composer who is regularly overlooked, if not nearly forgotten today.

Born four years after Mozart, and outliving Beethoven by fifteen years, Cherubini was a name to be reckoned with for a good half century. Beethoven, remarkably, said that Cherubini was the greatest composer among his contemporaries (which, just for the record, boasted a fair number of luminaries, including Rossini). Beethoven had written him an outright fan letter about the opera *Médée* a decade before they finally met. When Cherubini's opera *Faniska* was staged in Vienna in 1806, both

Beethoven and Haydn were in the audience and spoke glowingly of the work. Mendelssohn admired Cherubini the opera composer for “his sparkling fire, his clever and unexpected transitions, and the neatness and grace with which he writes.” Bruckner learned how to write his own sacred music by copying out movements of Cherubini's masses to study. Brahms, the most historically aware composer of the nineteenth century, revered Cherubini, and he hung a copy of the Ingres painting on the wall of his apartment (a large white bust of Beethoven, the only other composer so honored, sat over the piano). And Schumann said that “the more we come to understand him the more we come to respect him”—perhaps anticipating that one day people would make snap judgments on Cherubini's importance based on knowing a mere fraction of his large output. In one of Schumann's

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#### COMPOSED

1815

#### FIRST PERFORMANCE

1815, London

These are the first CSO performances

#### INSTRUMENTATION

one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, strings

#### APPROXIMATE

#### PERFORMANCE TIME

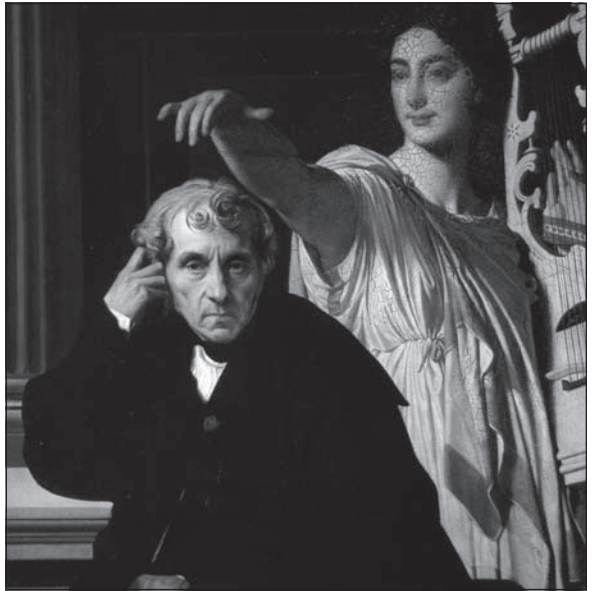
12 minutes

most important essays as a critic, he ranked Cherubini as “superior as a harmonist to all his contemporaries,” calling him the “refined, scholarly, interesting Italian whose severe reserve of strength and character sometimes leads me to compare him with Dante.”

Cherubini was born in Florence, and he enjoyed success with both serious and comic operas in Italy and in London before moving to Paris in 1788. There he had a string of hits, including *Lodoïska* in 1791 and *Médée* in 1797 (decades later Brahms still singled it out as “the work we musicians recognize among ourselves as the highest peak of dramatic music”). His fame continued to spread.

*Les deux journées* was so popular in Vienna that it was staged by two rival theaters on successive nights. His most celebrated works were his so-called rescue operas, which were particularly apt during revolutionary times, when hairbreadth escapes were everyday occurrences. In the first years of the nineteenth century, when Beethoven decided to write an opera, Cherubini’s works were the obvious models. In fact, it was Emanuel Schikaneder’s staging of *Lodoïska* in Vienna in 1802 that served as the immediate inspiration for Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, the only rescue opera that is still performed today.

By the early years of the nineteenth century, Cherubini had already become that rarest of musical figures at the time, an international celebrity. So it is hardly surprising that the new Royal Philharmonic Society in London asked him to write three works—an overture, a symphony, and an Italian vocal piece—for its second season in 1815 and to come to London to oversee their performance. The society had been founded “to promote the performance, in the most perfect manner possible of the best and most approved instrumental music,”



**Luigi Cherubini and the Muse of Lyric Poetry.**  
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1842

and its members wanted to prove their seriousness by commissioning the most important composers of the day. (Their track record is remarkable: both Beethoven’s

Ninth and Mendelssohn's *Italian* symphonies were written at their request.) Cherubini was apparently the first composer the society approached—at the instigation of Muzio Clementi, the Roman-born piano sensation who then lived in England, and Giovanni Viotti, the famed violin virtuoso, who had first met the composer in Paris in the 1780s.

When Cherubini arrived in London on February 25, 1815, he had the overture and the vocal work with him. (The symphony was written in March and April.) The vocal piece, a cantata, *Inno alla primavera*, is almost never performed today; the Symphony in D major, Cherubini's only work in the benchmark classical form, was not a great success in London and was later reworked as a string

quartet; it remains a rare visitor on concert programs in either version. The concert overture in G major that the Chicago Symphony plays (for the first time) this week is one of Cherubini's finest works, a distillation of all he had learned writing overtures for the opera house. The only overture Cherubini wrote for the concert hall, it is dramatic—as “theatrical” as any opera overture—impassioned, impeccably crafted (this was a Cherubini hallmark), and highly inventive—a reminder of how creativity flourished endlessly within the supposedly limited framework of classical style. It is a perfect curtain-raiser for a concert, which is what Cherubini had in mind, but it also opens a window for concertgoers today on a distinguished career that has largely slipped from view. ■



## Franz Liszt

Born October 22, 1811, Raiding, Hungary.

Died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth, Bavaria.

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### ***Les préludes*, Symphonic Poem No. 3, after Lamartine**

**O**n May 5, 1856, Liszt sent the newly published scores of six of his symphonic poems, including *Les préludes*, to Richard Wagner. In return, Wagner sent off the original scores to *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, followed by a letter full of kind words for Liszt's newest efforts. The two composers had been unusually close for many years, each sometimes alone in appreciating what the other was up to, although in the next decade, when Wagner fathered two illegitimate children with Liszt's daughter Cosima, the relationship was severely strained. But in 1856—Wagner never suspecting that he would one day have to accept Liszt as his father-in-law—they were united in pushing music

toward a new frontier. Scholars and musicians have argued over their comparative success ever since, and, although it is Wagner, largely by virtue of an advanced case of self-promotion and a very modern understanding of public relations, who is generally seen as the greater revolutionary, there are those who would agree with the verdict of Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, who knew them both: “[Liszt] has hurled his lance much farther into the future than Wagner.”

In November of 1856, Liszt and Wagner took part in a concert in Saint Gallen, with Wagner conducting the *Eroica* Symphony and Liszt his own *Orpheus* and *Les préludes*. In 1856, *Les préludes* was new music: it had been finished

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#### **COMPOSED**

1849–1855

#### **FIRST PERFORMANCE**

February 23, 1854, Weimar

#### **FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE**

January 29, 1892, Auditorium Theatre. Theodore Thomas conducting

#### **MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES**

May 10, 1992, Orchestra Hall.

Sir Georg Solti conducting

September 19, 2010,

Millennium Park. Riccardo

Muti conducting

#### **INSTRUMENTATION**

three flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, harp, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, strings

#### **APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME**

16 minutes

#### **CSO RECORDINGS**

1977. Daniel Barenboim conducting. Deutsche Grammophon

1992. Sir Georg Solti conducting. London

and first performed only two years before in Weimar. But it was also new in the more important sense of modern, fresh, and novel. That is sometimes hard to accept today, for *Les préludes* is arguably Liszt's best-known composition and certainly his most played orchestral work; and because of its fame and familiarity, and all the music that was later conceived in its image, we fail to realize its novelty.

There are a number of common misconceptions about Liszt's symphonic poems. Liszt did invent the name—the term *sinfonische Dichtung* (symphonic poem) was used for the first time in 1854—to describe music that did not strictly follow any of the classical forms, and that was, in some way, related to literary or pictorial works. But he did not invent the musical concept, which is a logical outgrowth of the single-movement dramatic overtures of Beethoven, rather than multimovement program symphonies like Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. There are precedents as well for Liszt's important experiments with one-movement forms and for his use of thematic transformation, often in place of a Beethovenian development of material. Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy, which Liszt knew well, played spectacularly, and later arranged for piano and orchestra, anticipates much that is essential to Liszt's best work.

The novelty of Liszt's symphonic poems is that, like Berlioz in his *Symphonie fantastique*, he took ideas that were in the air and made something unimagined, distinctive, successful, and highly influential.

Without *Les préludes* and the rest of the Liszt canon, Smetana's *Ma vlást*, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* are unthinkable.

Perhaps the greatest confusion about Liszt's works has to do with the relationship between the music and the program—that is, which came first. In most cases, it was the music. *Les préludes* had a previous life as an overture to an unpublished choral work, *Les quatre éléments* (The four elements), and Lamartine's poem was only unearthed when Liszt decided to make something of his overture and needed a title and general game plan to accompany it. All the musical themes in *Les préludes* came from the four pieces of the choral work, and they have more to do with earth and water than with Lamartine's war and peace. Still, Lamartine's title has served very nicely over the years, and, as long as we do not try to read too much into Liszt's music, neither Liszt nor Lamartine suffers.

The music is conceived in three large paragraphs with a brief introduction. The first paragraph contains most of the material for the work, including an important, flowing melody for cellos and second violins; the second begins tempestuously but dissolves into a genial, pastoral mood (and introduces a new theme); the final section is a triumphant reworking (marked *marziale*) of the first. The whole is tightly knit and wisely paced, and Liszt's trademark transformation of themes is particularly effective. ■



## Dmitri Shostakovich

Born September 25, 1906, Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Died August 9, 1975, Moscow, Russia.

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### Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, Op. 47

**D**mitri Shostakovich first came to the United States in March 1949. Before a crowd of 30,000 people in Madison Square Garden, he sat at a piano and played the scherzo from his Fifth Symphony. He arrived here as an official participant in the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, and he came, against his better judgment, because Stalin had telephoned him and asked him to come.

It is a disturbing and symbolic image: this great man, shy and unassuming behind his thick glasses, being trotted out to perform his best-known symphonic music on a piano in a sports arena.

This was but one of many battles Shostakovich fought in his war between the public platform and his private thoughts. A photograph taken at the time shows Shostakovich, his eyes avoiding the camera, standing uneasily between Norman Mailer and Arthur Miller.

Dmitri Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is perhaps the best-known work of art born from the marriage of politics and music. In 1949, when the Soviet composer came to America, the circumstances of its creation were as famous as the music itself. The facts are few, but telling. On January 28, 1936, while Shostakovich was working on his Fourth Symphony,

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#### COMPOSED

1937

#### FIRST PERFORMANCE

November 21, 1937;  
Leningrad, Russia

#### FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

July 17, 1941, Ravinia  
Festival. Nicolai  
Malko conducting

February 10, 1944,  
Orchestra Hall. Désiré  
Defauw conducting

#### MOST RECENT

##### CSO PERFORMANCE

February 8, 2011,  
Orchestra Hall. Leonard  
Slatkin conducting

#### INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets and E-flat clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, triangle, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, bells, xylophone, two harps, celesta, piano, strings

#### APPROXIMATE

##### PERFORMANCE TIME

46 minutes

#### CSO RECORDINGS

1977. André Previn  
conducting. Angel

2006. Myung-Whun  
Chung conducting.  
CSO Resound

*Pravda* denounced his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in an article called “Muddle instead of Music.” Although the opera had been triumphantly received in both Moscow and Leningrad during the previous two years—and in more than 175 performances—it was suddenly and decisively attacked as fidgety, screaming, neurotic, coarse, primitive, and vulgar. Although Shostakovich himself was not the recipient of such well-chosen adjectives, there was no question of where he now stood in the eyes of Soviet authorities.

Shostakovich went ahead and finished his Fourth Symphony—a vast, exploratory, tragic work—but when it came time to unveil it in public, he had second thoughts and withdrew the score. (It waited twenty-five years to be performed.) Then, after a long silence, came his official response, written in just three months. Shostakovich now issued “the creative reply of a Soviet artist to justified criticism,” the astonishing phrase that is forever linked with the work’s official title, Symphony no. 5.

Sorting fact from fiction is no mere pastime in discussing Soviet music. On such distinctions hangs our understanding of important musical impulses. Many a listener, as well as political historian, has pondered the justification for the Soviet criticism and the motivation for the reply. For the record, we can consider the composer’s own words, written at the time, although they are less than fully enlightening: “The theme of my Fifth Symphony is the making of a

man. I saw man with all his experiences in the center of the composition, which is lyrical in form from beginning to end. In the finale, the tragically tense impulses of the earlier movements are resolved in optimism and joy of living.” There is, of course, some incontrovertible evidence, like the wild success of the Fifth Symphony when it was introduced on November 21, 1937, in Leningrad under the baton of Eugene Mravinsky, and the subsequent official embrace of Shostakovich, speedily returned to favor.

In the end, the music must speak for itself. In place of the “screaming,” “primitive” music that got him into trouble, Shostakovich now gives us clarity and brilliance. And, despite intermittent tensions, we have a happy ending. Like Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler before him, Shostakovich has written a fifth symphony that sets out to triumph over adversity, with the major key supplanting the minor in the final movement. The power of this music is undeniable, although not everyone was satisfied that its deeper content was really politically correct—after hearing Shostakovich’s new symphony for the first time, the great novelist Boris Pasternak wrote, “He went and said everything, and no one did anything to him for it.”

Clarity of form and texture is the hallmark of the large—and not uncomplicated—first movement. From the jagged *Grosse Fuge*-like opening theme to the climatic, grotesque march over a relentless

snare-drum rhythm, Shostakovich takes pains not to lose us in intricate lines of counterpoint or disorienting harmonies. For every page of the score that calls on the full resources of the orchestra, there are countless others on which few notes are written. The second theme, for example, is a serene, soaring violin melody of wide leaps—we are never quite certain where it will land next—over simple chords that slowly change colors as they repeat their “tum ta-ta” pattern.

The Allegretto that follows (a traditional scherzo and trio form) is as merry and good-natured as any music that came from Shostakovich’s pen. If this were the only music of his that we knew, we might not be so quick to read a note of irony into the solo violin’s teasing melody in the trio. But this is music in a singularly untroubled vein, and that is precisely what the Madison Square Garden crowd was meant to hear.

Shostakovich claimed he wrote the Largo at white heat in three

days—information that is hard to digest once one hears this calm and controlled music, moving slowly over vast, wide-open spaces. The lucid, thin textures occasionally turn spartan—a solo oboe melody against a single sustained violin note, a flute duet accompanied by a quiet harp—but every phrase carries meaning, and every note is indispensable.

If darkness blankets the eloquent Largo, the finale erupts with power and brilliance. A triumphant conclusion was mandatory—particularly after the troubled thoughts of the preceding slow movement. When the D minor struggles finally shift into an affirmative D major blast, it is only our hindsight—our knowledge of the undeniable sorrow and despair of Shostakovich’s last works—that suggests this happy ending is somehow forced. ■

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