Esa-Pekka Salonen Conductor
Leila Josefowicz Violin

Debussy
Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun

J. Adams
Scheherazade.2
Tale of the Wise Young Woman—Pursuit by the True Believers
A Long Desire (love scene)
Scheherazade and the Men with Beards
Escape, Flight, Sanctuary

LEILA JOSEFOWICZ
First Chicago Symphony Orchestra performances

INTERMISSION

Stravinsky
The Rite of Spring
The Adoration of the Earth
The Sacrifice

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Claude Debussy
Born August 22, 1862; Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France
Died March 25, 1918; Paris, France

Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun

The year Debussy returned to Paris from Rome—where he unhappily served time as the upshot of winning the coveted Prix de Rome—he bought a copy of Stéphane Mallarmé’s The Afternoon of a Faun to give to his friend Paul Dukas, who didn’t get beyond the preliminary round of the competition. Eventually Dukas would establish his credentials with The Sorcerer’s Apprentice, but by then Debussy was already famous for his Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun.

By 1887, Stéphane Mallarmé had begun hosting his famous gatherings every Tuesday evening in his apartment, where his daughter Geneviève served the punch. Debussy sometimes dropped in at 89, rue de Rome (an unfortunate reminder of a city he had happily left) to partake of the punch and the lively exchange of ideas, and in time he and Mallarmé became friends. In 1898, he was among those first notified of the poet’s death.

Mallarmé’s poem, The Afternoon of a Faun, was published in 1876, in a slim, elegantly bound volume with a line drawing by Édouard Manet on the cover. We don’t know when Debussy first thought of interpreting Mallarmé’s faun and his dreams of conquering nymphs, nor to what degree he and Mallarmé discussed the prospect. As late as 1891, Mallarmé was still contemplating some kind of dramatized reading of his text, and perhaps Debussy was meant to fit into that scheme. Debussy began sketching his music in 1892. In 1893, and again in 1894, announcements promised “Prélude, interludes et paraphrase finale” for The Afternoon of a Faun, but the full orchestral score Debussy finished on October 23, 1894, contained only the prelude.

Mallarmé first heard this music in Debussy’s apartment, where the composer played his score at the piano. “I didn’t expect anything like this,”

Above: Photo of Debussy by Félix Nadar, ca. 1908

Frontispiece of Stéphane Mallarmé’s poem The Afternoon of a Faun. Drawing by Édouard Manet, 1876. The Jacques Doucet Library; Paris, France

**COMPOSED**
1892–October 23, 1894

**FIRST PERFORMANCE**
December 22, 1894; Paris, France

**INSTRUMENTATION**
three flutes, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two harps, cymbals, strings

**APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME**
10 minutes

**FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES**
November 23 and 24, 1906, Orchestra Hall. Frederick Stock conducting
July 5, 1936, Ravinia Festival. Ernest Ansermet conducting

**MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES**
March 7, 9, and 12, 2013, Orchestra Hall. Cristian Măcelaru conducting
July 21, 2013, Ravinia Festival. James Conlon conducting

**CSO RECORDINGS**
Mallarmé said, “This music prolongs the emotion of my poem, and sets its scene more vividly than color.” The first orchestral performance, on December 22, was an immediate success (despite poor horn playing), and an encore was demanded. Mallarmé was there; he later said that Debussy’s music “presents no dissonance with my text: rather, it goes further into the nostalgia and light with subtlety, malaise, and richness.”

Revolutionary works of art are seldom granted such instant, easy success. Inevitably, there was some question about the score’s programmatic intentions, to which Debussy responded at once: “It is a general impression of the poem, for if music were to follow more closely it would run out of breath, like a dray horse competing for the grand prize with a thoroughbred.”

The music itself seems to have ruffled few feathers, despite the way it quietly, yet systematically, overturns tradition and opens new frontiers in musical language. Camille Saint-Saëns was one of the few detractors, yet even his put down—“It’s as much a piece of music as the palette a painter has worked from is a painting”—suggests an understanding that Debussy was constructing a piece of music in a radical way. (Saint-Saëns’s words recall Mallarmé’s own famous, often misunderstood mission “to paint not the thing but the effect it produces.”) Toward the end of his life, Maurice Ravel remembered that “it was [upon] hearing this work, so many years ago, that I first understood what real music was.” Pierre Boulez would later date the awakening of modern music from Debussy’s score.

Saint-Saëns might well have noted how the now-famous opening flute melody, all sinuous curves and slippery rhythms, resembles the most popular melody he would ever write, “Mon coeur s’ouvre a ta voix” (known in English as “My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice”) from Samson and Dalilah. But where Dalilah’s aria is rooted in D-flat major and common time, Debussy’s portrait of the faun eludes our attempts to tap our feet or to establish a key; its insistence on the interval from C-sharp to G-natural argues repeatedly against the E major key signature printed on the page.

The whole of the Prelude can be considered a series of variations on a single theme, and we can simply listen to the ways it changes, almost imperceptibly, and grows. There’s a more conventional middle section in D-flat, urgently lyrical and more fully scored, which raises the music to fortissimo for the only time in the piece and then sinks down again with the sounds of the flute melody.

Debussy uses the orchestra with extraordinary finesse, drawing such rich and provocative sounds from his winds (including three flutes, an english horn, and four horns) that we scarcely notice the absence of trumpets, trombones, and timpani. The only percussion instruments necessary are two antique cymbals, each allotted just five notes apiece—a triumph of artistry over cost-efficiency.

In 1912, Sergei Diaghilev, who would soon create a notorious scandal with Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring, produced a ballet from Debussy’s music. It was danced and choreographed by the celebrated Nijinsky, who claimed never to have read Mallarmé’s text, and who caused a sensation by foisting heavy-duty eroticism on Debussy’s delicate score. ■
Scheherazade.2, Dramatic Symphony for Violin and Orchestra

Ever since his first opera, Nixon in China, drew attention because its subjects were famous living people and its domain was contemporary politics, John Adams has not shied away from difficult and important topics. In subsequent operas, he tackled the Middle East (The Death of Klinghoffer) and nuclear war (Doctor Atomic), and the new opera he is now composing for San Francisco, Girls of the Golden West—the premiere is set for next November—deals with race and women’s rights. His work has inevitably divided listeners and created controversy—the Metropolitan Opera’s 2014 production of Klinghoffer was the target of highly publicized protests and, as Adams recently said, he once got “five minutes of scolding from Rush Limbaugh.” But he continues to address issues that are indispensable to him. (Despite the enduring popularity of his landmark Nixon in China, he told a reporter last month that “the idea of a Trump opera doesn’t interest me in the least.”)

Scheherazade.2, Adams’s most recent large-scale orchestral work, deals with one of the central issues of our day—and throughout history: the abuse of women. Responding to the legendary tale of Scheherazade—already given musical voice in Rimsky-Korsakov’s popular 1888 tone poem—Adams set out to portray a modern-day Scheherazade, a strong and independent woman who could “speak back to power,” as Adams has said. He has chosen to call the resulting work a “dramatic symphony,” borrowing the term from Berlioz, even though this new score is dominated by an expansive, concerto-like violin solo to represent the Scheherazade of today. In a recent interview, Adams said that his empathy for women has partly resulted from the years he has spent living with two impressive, accomplished women—his wife Deborah O’Grady, a photographer; and his daughter Emily, a painter. “I do think of the feminine as an archetypal notion of warmth, expressiveness, understanding, and also of power,” he said. “Those are the kinds of energies that are really behind the meaning of music.”

In a short period of time, Adams grew from minimalist upstart to grand statesman of American music. (His storied name makes him a shoe-in to inherit the “president of American music” title Virgil Thomson bestowed on Copland.) He was showered with tributes around the world last month, when he celebrated his seventieth birthday (including being named visiting professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London). Over the years his work has been given many honors, in addition to attracting the kind of large and devoted following that is rare in the arts today. In 1995, his Violin Concerto won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award. On the Transmigration of Souls, which he wrote to honor the victims of the 9/11 attacks, won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Music. In 2004, Adams became the first recipient of the Nemmers Prize in Music Composition from Northwestern University. Like many mainstream institutions, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra was slow to endorse his bracing new compositional voice, but it quickly made amends. By now, the Orchestra has played many of his important pieces, from
A Short Ride in a Fast Machine to Harmonielehre, one of the few landmarks of late twentieth-century music, performed here in 2007 and again in 2015. Adams himself programmed and conducted two weeks of Chicago Symphony subscription concerts in Orchestra Hall in 1999.

Adams was reared on music of all kinds. His father played clarinet—the instrument his young son would take up as well—and his mother sang with big bands. “In the house where I grew up, we had Mozart and we had Benny Goodman on the record player, and I was not raised to think there was a difference between them,” he once said. In 1965, he went to Harvard, where he studied composition with Schoenberg disciple Leon Kirchner. While at Harvard, he played clarinet in the orchestra for the American premiere of Schoenberg’s opera Moses and Aron in Boston, which was his first hands-on experience with the composer whose famous harmony treatise would lend its title, Harmonielehre, to his own first large-scale symphonic work. In 1971, with a copy of John Cage’s book Silence under his arm, he left the East behind for the Bay Area, where he has lived and worked ever since.

As a composer, Adams was attracted not to the thorny complexities of Schoenberg and his followers, but to the stripped-down purity of musical minimalism. He became a convert in 1974, when he heard Steve Reich and Musicians perform Reich’s landmark Drumming. Adams’s own early works used what he found most appealing in the minimalist vocabulary, but from the start he was trying to say more complicated things. Over time, Adams enriched the minimalist vocabulary almost beyond recognition, even though he has called minimalism “the only really interesting stylistic development” in the musical world at the end of the twentieth century. “It is responsible for a revolution in music.” As he said in a 1992 interview,

Minimalism was a wonderful shock to Western art music. It was like a bucket of fresh spring water splashed on the grim and rigid visage of serious music. I can’t imagine how stark and unforgiving the musical landscape would be like without it. But I think that as an expressive tool the style absolutely had to evolve and become more complex.

And in work after work, Adams’s voice and the minimalist style both evolved. His most recent works include Absolute Jest, for string quartet and orchestra, which references the music of Beethoven; a saxophone concerto; a second string quartet; and an opera–oratorio, The Gospel According to the Other Mary. Scheherazade.2 is the latest in a substantial family of orchestral pieces that goes back to the very beginning of his career. It is his third score for solo violin and orchestra, following the Violin Concerto of 1993 and The Dharma at Big Sur, composed in 2003.

John Adams on Scheherazade.2

The impetus for the piece was an exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris detailing the history of the Arabian Nights and of Scheherazade and how this story has evolved over the centuries. The casual brutality toward women that lies at the base of many of these tales prodded me to think about the many images of women oppressed or abused or violated that we see today in the news on a daily basis. In the old tale, Scheherazade is the lucky one who, through her endless inventiveness, is able to save her life. But there is not much to celebrate here when one thinks that she is spared simply because of her cleverness and ability to keep on entertaining her warped, murderous husband.

Thinking about what a Scheherazade in our own time might be brought to mind some famous examples of women under threat for their lives, for example the “woman in the blue bra” in Tahrir Square, dragged through the streets, severely beaten, humiliated and physically exposed by enraged, violent men. Or the young Iranian student, Neda Agha-Soltan, who was shot to death while attending a peaceful protest in Teheran. Or women routinely attacked and even executed by religious fanatics in any number of countries—India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, wherever. The modern images that come to mind certainly aren’t exclusive to the Middle East—we see examples, if not quite so graphic, nonetheless profoundly disturbing, from everywhere in the world, including in our own country and even on our own college campuses.

So I was suddenly struck by the idea of a “dramatic symphony” in which the principal
character role is taken by the solo violin—and she would be Scheherazade. While not having an actual story line or plot, the symphony follows a set of provocative images: a beautiful young woman with grit and personal power; a pursuit by “true believers”; a love scene (who knows . . . perhaps her lover is also a woman?); a scene in which she is tried by a court of religious zealots (“Scheherazade and the Men with Beards”), during which the men argue doctrine among themselves and rage and shout at her, only to have her calmly respond to their accusations; and a final “escape, flight, and sanctuary,” which must be the archetypal dream of any woman importuned by a man or men.

I composed the piece specifically for Leila Josefowicz, who has been my friend and champion of my music (and many other composers) for nearly fifteen years. Together we’ve performed my Violin Concerto and my concerto for amplified violin, The Dharma at Big Sur, many times. This work is a true collaboration and reflects a creative dialogue that went back and forth for well over a year and that I expect will continue long after the first performance. I find Leila a perfect embodiment of that kind of empowered strength and energy that a modern Scheherazade would possess.

Igor Stravinsky
Born June 17, 1882; Oranienbaum, Russia
Died April 6, 1971; New York City

The Rite of Spring (Scenes of Pagan Russia in Two Parts)

In 1911, Stravinsky began the score that would create the biggest riot in the history of music. He was already famous, just as Diaghilev had predicted—during rehearsals for The Firebird he pointed to Stravinsky and said, “Mark him well; he is a man on the eve of celebrity.” But Le sacre du printemps, or The Rite of Spring as we have come to call it, put him at the very forefront of the avant-garde and spread his name to corners of the world where news of the latest styles in French ballet rarely traveled. (Although when the score was suggested to Walt Disney for his film Fantasia, he asked “The Sock?,” clearly never having heard of Le sacre.)

First, a word about the title. Stravinsky called his ballet Vesna svyashchennaya, Russian for “holy spring.” The painter Léon Bakst was the one who suggested Le sacre du printemps during rehearsals. The standard English version, The Rite of Spring, first used by Diaghilev for a London revival in 1921, was quickly sanctioned by a public tired of trying to get the French pronunciation right.

May 29, 1913, the night The Rite of Spring opened at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, is one of the dates historians cite as the start of the modern age, like 1907, the year Picasso painted Les demoiselles d’Avignon; or 1922, when The Waste...
Land and Ulysses were published. As Pierre Boulez has written,

*The Rite of Spring* serves as a point of reference to all who seek to establish the birth certificate of what is still called “contemporary” music. A kind of manifesto work, somewhat in the same way and probably for the same reasons as Picasso’s *Demoiselles d’Avignon,* it has not ceased to engender, first, polemics, then, praise, and, finally, the necessary clarification.

The premiere is engraved in all the music history textbooks, first of all because of the outrage it provoked—in time, it has become the most notorious scandal in music and one of cultural history’s most cherished riots. The principal players, in addition to Stravinsky, were Sergei Diaghilev, the impresario; Pierre Monteux, the conductor; and Vaslav Nijinsky, the dancer who was making his debut as a choreographer.

The scene has often been retold: the audience grew restless and noisy almost as soon as the music began, and when the dancing started, it erupted. “I have never again been that angry,” Stravinsky later wrote. “The music was so familiar to me; I loved it, and I could not understand why people who had not heard it wanted to protest in advance.” There were catcalls and fistfights; one fight victim called out for a dentist. According to the artist Valentine Hugo, who was there (and made the four books of drawings that helped the Joffrey Ballet reconstruct the original production in 1987), the entire theater “seemed to be shaken by an earthquake.” Diaghilev flipped the house lights off and on to quiet the crowd. Nijinsky, recognizing imminent disaster, stood on a chair in the wings shouting numbers, directions, and general encouragement to his dancers. And all the while Pierre Monteux continued conducting. “He stood there apparently

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**Jean Cocteau’s caricature of Stravinsky playing The Rite of Spring, with dancers in the background, 1913**

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**COMPOSED**

1911–12

**FIRST PERFORMANCE**

May 29, 1913; Paris, France

**INSTRUMENTATION**

two piccolos, three flutes and alto flute, four oboes and two english horns, three clarinets, E-flat clarinet and two bass clarinets, four bassoons and two contrabassoons, eight horns, two Wagner tubas, four trumpets, high trumpet and bass trumpet, three trombones and two tubas, timpani, bass drum, tambourine, cymbals, antique cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, güiro (a scraped gourd), strings

**APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME**

35 minutes

**FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES**

November 7 and 8, 1924, Orchestra Hall. Frederick Stock conducting

July 21, 1962, Ravinia Festival. Robert Craft conducting

**MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES**

July 8, 2011, Ravinia Festival. Christoph Eschenbach conducting

**FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES**

November 14, 15, and 17, 2012, Orchestra Hall. Charles Dutoit conducting

November 16 and 18, 2012, Orchestra Hall. Charles Dutoit conducting (Beyond the Score)

**CSO RECORDINGS**

1968. Seiji Ozawa conducting. RCA


2000. Daniel Barenboim conducting. Teldec
impervious and as nerveless as a crocodile,” Stravinsky remembered. “It is still almost incredible to me that he actually brought the orchestra through to the end.”

The spectacle of the premiere has always overshadowed the fact that at the dress rehearsal, before an invited audience which included Debussy and Ravel, and at the subsequent performances, *The Rite of Spring* didn’t cause any commotion. And most reports of opening night fail to point out that, despite the revolutionary nature of Stravinsky’s music, it was the dancing that provoked the audience. (After the opening moments, it would have been difficult even to hear the orchestra. “One literally could not, throughout the whole performance, hear the sound of music,” Gertrude Stein later commented, with characteristic poetic license because, after all, she wasn’t actually there.) As Stravinsky was fond of remembering, after the first concert performance almost a year later, the crowd cheered and he was carried aloft through the theater and into the Place de la Trinité.

It’s impossible today to imagine the shock of a musical score that, like Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony (written just over a century earlier), has had its freshness and daring dimmed by familiarity. When the Chicago Symphony played it for the first time in 1924, its notoriety had certainly preceded it, and the Orchestra did everything in its power to lead audiences safely through it, including the onstage use of cue cards, lettered like movie subtitles, to announce the subdivisions of the score. (“Dissonant, barbaric, complex, rhythmically new,” the *Herald and Examiner* critic reported, “it crowds impressions and sensations upon the listener which, because of their complete novelty, cannot be assimilated at first hearing.”)

The most audacious of the musical innovations are certainly rhythmic. In the Augers of Spring, the famous section near the very beginning, a single massive chord repeated again and again, like a fast pulse, is shot through with irregularly spaced, unpredictable accents. It was murder on Nijinsky’s dancers, just as it is for listeners today who must prove their musicality by beating time. That section, at least, Stravinsky could notate in a conventional 2/4, with accents landing wherever they fell. But the final sacrificial dance was so new in its rhythmic conception that he couldn’t even find a way to put it on paper at first—even though he could play it at the piano. He eventually juggled bar lines and time signatures to

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**THE RITE OF SPRING**

(Scenes of Pagan Russia in Two Parts)

Here is the synopsis Stravinsky furnished for Serge Koussevitzky’s 1914 performance:

Holy Spring is a musical-choreographic work. It represents pagan Russia and is unified by a single idea: the mystery and great surge of the creative power of spring. The piece has no plot, but the choreographic succession is as follows:

First Part: The Adoration of the Earth: The spring celebration. It takes place in the hills. The pipers pipe and young men tell fortunes. The old woman enters. She knows the mystery of nature and how to predict the future. Young girls with painted faces come in from the river in single file. They dance the spring dance. Games start. The Spring Khorovod (a round dance). The people divide into two groups, opposing each other. The holy procession of the wise old men. The oldest and wisest interrupts the spring games, which come to a stop. The people pause, trembling before the great action. The old men bless the spring earth. The Adoration of the Earth. The people dance passionately on the earth, sanctifying it and becoming one with it.

Second Part: The Great Sacrifice: At night the virgins hold mysterious games, walking in circles. One of the virgins is consecrated as the victim and is twice pointed to by fate, being twice caught in the perpetual circle. The virgins honor her, the Chosen One. They invoke the ancestors and entrust the Chosen One to the old wise men. She sacrifices herself in the presence of the old men in the great holy dance, the great sacrifice.
correspond to what his hands wanted; the meter changes in nearly every measure (it begins 3/16, 2/16, 3/16, 3/16, 2/8, 2/16, 3/16).

There are many celebrated passages. Stravinsky layers different strict, ticking ostinato patterns—the orchestra sounds like a clock shop gone mad—to create a tension unknown in music. There is that famous pounding chord itself, the heartbeat of the Augers of Spring, a prophetic mixture of two unrelated tonalities, with an F-flat chord on the bottom and an E-flat seventh chord on top. It’s tempting to regard The Rite of Spring as an anthology of brilliant effects, from the opening solo for very high bassoon (quoted in all the textbooks on orchestration) to the giant whoosh with which the furious final dance collapses. But it’s the cumulative sweep of rhythmic energy that gives the score a life all its own. The Rite of Spring is as tight and shrewdly paced as a Hitchcock thriller; it still leaves audiences gasping a hundred years after it was written.

A few words about the genesis of the music. Stravinsky claimed his first “fleeting vision” of this piece came to him in the spring of 1910, as he was finishing The Firebird. “I saw in my imagination,” he later recalled, “a solemn pagan rite: sage elders, seated in a circle, watched a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring.” The scenario was planned in collaboration with the Russian painter and archeologist Nikolai Roerich, in the summer of 1910, before a note was written.

Stravinsky began to compose the music in Clarens, Switzerland, in the fall of 1911, at a small upright piano wedged into a room just eight feet square. It was in that room—with the piano, mercifully, muted for composing—that he hit upon the pounding chords of the Augers of Spring. Part 1 was finished early in January 1912, and he played through it for Pierre Monteux. “Before he got very far,” the conductor remembers, “I was convinced he was raving mad.” Early in June, Stravinsky persuaded Debussy to play through the four-hand arrangement of the score with him at a party. It was hardly typical party music, and when they were done, one guest recalls, “We were dumbfounded, overwhelmed by this hurricane which had come from the depths of the ages and which had taken life by the roots.” Stravinsky completed the entire score in sketch on November 17, “with an unbearable toothache.” Rehearsals for the ballet lasted six months; Stravinsky uncharacteristically stayed away until the very end. Despite the dancers’ difficulties with the music’s uncountable rhythms, rehearsals went on without incident. Stravinsky walked into the theater on May 29 unprepared for what would soon follow.

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