Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Riccardo Muti Zell Music Director
Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

Wednesday, March 30, 2016, at 6:30

Afterwork Masterworks

Susanna Mälkki Conductor
Gil Shaham Violin

Bartók
Violin Concerto No. 2
Allegro non troppo
Theme and Variations: Andante tranquillo
Rondo: Allegro molto

GIL SHAHAM

Rimsky-Korsakov
Sheherazade, Op. 35
The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship
The Tale of the Dervish Prince
The Young Prince and the Young Princess
Festival in Baghdad, and the Sea

Robert Chen, violin

There will be no intermission.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra is grateful to WBBM Newsradio 780 and 105.9 FM for its generous support of the Afterwork Masterworks series.

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

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIFTH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Riccardo Muti Zell Music Director
Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

Thursday, March 31, 2016, at 8:00
Friday, April 1, 2016, at 1:30
Saturday, April 2, 2016, at 8:00

Susanna Mälkki Conductor
Gil Shaham Violin

Debussy
Gigues, Images for Orchestra No. 1

Bartók
Violin Concerto No. 2
Allegro non troppo
Theme and Variations: Andante tranquillo
Rondo: Allegro molto

GIL SHAHAM

INTERMISSION

Rimsky-Korsakov
Sheherazade, Op. 35
The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship
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Robert Chen, violin

Thursday’s performance has been made possible by a generous gift from Robert J. Buford.

This work is part of the CSO Premiere Retrospective, which is generously sponsored by the Sargent Family Foundation.

This program is partially supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.
Claude Debussy
Born August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France.
Died March 25, 1918, Paris, France.

Gigues, Images for Orchestra No. 1
Performed as part of the CSO Premiere Retrospective

Debussy’s three Images are his last concert-hall orchestral works, followed only by Jeux, which was designed for dancing. All three began as piano music, however—a third installment in Debussy’s sets of Images for piano. Debussy planned them in 1905, the same year he completed La mer and the second set of piano Images. His original idea was to compose this new set for two pianos; he even proposed titles to Jacques Durand, his publisher: Gigues tristes, Ibéria, and Valses—portraits in sound of three different countries.

But Debussy eventually changed his mind about two of his titles and one of his subjects—leaving, as it were, the waltz idea to Ravel—and decided to score the pieces not for two pianos but for large orchestra. (The 1905 piano Images had already required three staves on each page to accommodate the rich textures and complexity of Debussy’s ideas.) In the end, it would be another eight years before these Images were finished.

Debussy’s new project began well enough; in a letter to Durand dated July 7, 1906, he said that Ibéria would be finished “next week” and that the other two would follow by the end of the month. But the next year, when none of them were done, he attempted to explain to Durand why the Images were such slow going: “I’m trying to write ‘something different’—realities, in a manner of speaking—what imbeciles call ‘impressionism,’ a term employed with the utmost inaccuracy, especially by art critics, who use it as a label to stick on Turner, the finest creator of mystery in the whole of art!” With important, groundbreaking works such as La mer and Pelleas and Melisande behind him, and with these Images still on the drafting table, Debussy was struggling to articulate—both to understand and to define—the continually evolving “new-ness” of his work. He wrote to Durand that same year: “I feel more and more that music, by its very essence, is not something that can flow inside a rigorous, traditional form. It consists of colors and of rhythmicized time.”

In 1909, the year he began serious work on Gigues, Debussy posed for the Parisian photographer Nadar (the Richard Avedon or Annie Leibovitz of the day), who had captured all the reigning celebrities from Rossini to Delacroix. Debussy wore an expensive but ill-fitting suit,

COMPOSED
1909–12

FIRST PERFORMANCE
January 26, 1913; Paris, France

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES
November 13 & 14, 1914, Orchestra Hall. Frederick Stock conducting (Gigues) (U.S. premiere)
July 14, 1951, Ravinia Festival. Pierre Monteux conducting (Rondes de printemps and Gigues)

MOST RECENT
CSO PERFORMANCES
July 1, 1990, Ravinia Festival. James Levine conducting (complete Images)
April 12 & 13, 2012, Orchestra Hall. Charles Dutoit conducting (complete Images)

APPROXIMATE
PERFORMANCE TIME
8 minutes

CSO RECORDING
1967. Jean Martinon conducting. CSO (From the Archives, vol. 12: A Tribute to Jean Martinon) (complete Images)

INSTRUMENTATION
two flutes and two piccolos, two oboes, oboe d’amore and english horn, three clarinets and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, celesta, two harps, strings
and as his close friend René Peter noted, “Our Claude, still so young and eager, has taken on a sort of patina and no longer looks himself.” That same year, when the first French biography of the composer was published, Debussy seemed uncomfortable with the attention (“I am not sure of being absolutely all that you say I am,” he wrote to the author Louis Laloy).

Eventually Debussy finished the three *Images*, though not without effort and growing apathy—Léon Vallas, the composer’s reliable biographer, even says that the orchestration of *Gigues* was completed by André Caplet. From the beginning, these *Images* have had important champions—Gustav Mahler gave the U.S. premiere of *Rondes de printemps* and *Ibéria* (in 1910 and 1911, respectively) with the New York Philharmonic, and Frederick Stock led the American premiere of *Gigues* with the Chicago Symphony in November 1914, less than two years after Debussy conducted the first performance in Paris.

Debussy originally called the first piece in his set *Gigues tristes* (Sad jigs), and even though he dropped the adjective, the music is haunted and melancholy. Debussy quotes folk song to help provide local color—in this case, it’s a Scottish tune mournfully sung by the oboe d’amore, which makes its only appearance in *Images* for just this purpose. (The bassoons also suggest “The Keel Row.”) What drives the music forward is the interplay of two distinct worlds—the leisurely folk tune and a jaunty dotted rhythmic figure. (Caplet, who is credited with carrying out Debussy’s wishes in orchestrating *Gigues* and who clearly wanted to hear it as program music, detected a battle between “a wounded soul” and a “grotesque marionette.”) They collide, overlap, and intersect, lending the piece a sense of the unpredictable and giving it a complexity quite at odds with its supposed folk roots.

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**In Memoriam**

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association recalls with sorrow the recent passing of Orchestra and Board members.

**FRANCIS AKOS (1922–2016)**

**SIDNEY EPSTEIN (1924–2016)**
Béla Bartók
Born March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Transylvania (now part of Romania).
Died September 26, 1945, New York City.

Violin Concerto No. 2

This used to be known as the Bartók violin concerto. In August 1936, when Zoltán Székely asked Bartók to compose a violin concerto for him, he had no idea that Bartók had already written one nearly thirty years before. When Bartók died in 1945, seven years after Székely gave the premiere of this concerto, the earlier score was still unknown, and so the later work took its place in the final tally of Bartók’s output as his only violin concerto. But in 1956, the manuscript of Bartók’s early violin concerto, written for his first great love, violinist Stefi Geyer, surfaced, shedding new light on Bartók’s personal life and revising the catalog of his works in the process.

Three decades—and a lifetime of writing music and working with musicians—separate Bartók’s two violin concertos. In 1907, when Bartók composed the first one, he was twenty-six and full of promise; he hadn’t yet written any of the music for which he is famous today. In 1937, when he began his second, he was at the peak of his considerable powers. He had composed two important piano concertos; brilliant works for the stage, including the opera Bluebeard’s Castle and the pantomime The Miraculous Mandarin; and a series of string quartets that redefined the form. And, when Székely proposed the idea of a new concerto, Bartók was putting the finishing touches on another pioneering score, the Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta.

The musical climate had changed radically in those thirty years as well. Bartók’s first violin concerto predates Schoenberg’s first fully atonal music and Stravinsky’s breakthrough with The Rite of Spring. By the mid-1930s, Schoenberg was single-mindedly devoted to his newly created twelve-tone system, and Stravinsky was enjoying the stylistic games of his neoclassical phase—he began his Beethovenian Symphony in C, in honor of the Chicago Symphony’s fiftieth anniversary, while Bartók was writing his new violin concerto. (And in the meantime, the entire career of Alban Berg, who gave the twentieth century a handful of its greatest masterworks, had come and gone.)

Less than a month after Székely first suggested the idea of a violin concerto, Bartók asked his publisher to send him some recent examples—he wanted to see firsthand how the landscape had changed since his earlier work, and, in a sense, judge what was still left to be said in the form before he committed to the project. (Universal Editions mailed him violin concertos by Berg,
It was another year before he started work on the piece, scribbling two themes on the back of a page of his nearly finished Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion sometime in August 1937. When Székely visited him at the end of September, Bartók had already written out the first two pages of the violin part, and the two played through them together—Székely discovering his new concerto on the spot; Bartók suggesting the orchestral music at the piano. The concerto wasn’t finished for another year, and in March 1939, Székely and Bartók got together again, this time in Paris, for several days of rehearsing—and in the process—revising the score. (This is when Bartók added the two quick upbeat notes to the broad, singing main theme.)

Székely and Bartók had known each other since the early 1920s. They frequently played chamber music together, and in 1928 Bartók dedicated his Second Violin Rhapsody to his friend. In 1935 Székely founded the Hungarian String Quartet, which performed Bartók’s quartets with rare understanding and passion. Although Bartók didn’t play the violin himself (he was a formidable pianist), he wrote magnificent, challenging, yet idiomatic music for the instrument. In his string quartet cycle, he showed that the violin was a perfect vehicle for his great flights of invention. With the new violin concerto, he gave the instrument one of its greatest and most demanding solo roles.

Bartók’s original plan was to write a big one-movement set of variations, but Székely wanted a bona fide three-movement concerto, like the great classics. Each got his wish—Székely his three movements, Bartók his variations, as the second of the three. (In addition, the third movement is essentially a variation on the material of the first.) The concerto is one of the first works to demonstrate the clarity and directness of Bartók’s late style, starting with the opening—a strong, folklike melody over plain, shifting chords. The first movement is a grand rhapsody. With its expansive, evolving theme and elastic tempo—Bartók adjusts the speed every few measures—it sounds almost improvisatory. Of course, it is all meticulously worked out, including the written-down cadenza which begins, just before the orchestra drops out, with the soloist playing pitch-bending quarter tones.

In the central Andante tranquillo, Bartók writes the most formal set of variations of his career. The theme is simplicity itself—a haunted tune accompanied by low strings, harp, and timpani. In the six variations that follow, the theme is elaborated, growing not just more florid but also more aggressive and discordant, and then stripped to its essence, before taking off again into new flights of fancy.

The finale, which begins like a bold dance, takes many of its ideas from the first movement, but continuously reinvents them. Originally Bartók had the solo part drop out twenty-six measures before the end of the piece, but Székely wanted it to finish “like a concerto, not like a symphony,” and so Bartók rewrote the conclusion so that everyone plays together to the last measure.

BÉLA BARTÓK AND THE CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Over the years, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra has benefited from close ties to Bartók, who came here himself to play his Second Piano Concerto in 1941. Fritz Reiner, CSO music director from 1953 to 1962, was a student of Bartók and an early champion of his music. Reiner conducted the U.S. premiere of the First Piano Concerto with the composer at the keyboard, in New York City, during Bartók’s first U.S. tour in 1928. He also led Bartók’s final public performance, in the Concerto for Two Pianos, in 1943, with Bartók’s wife Ditta at the second piano. Although Bartók never learned of it, it was Reiner, along with violinist Joseph Szigeti, who suggested that Koussevitzky commission the Concerto for Orchestra for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Sir Georg Solti, CSO music director from 1969 to 1991, also studied with Bartók, his countryman, at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest in the late 1920s. Solti always remembered turning pages—on a moment’s notice—at the Budapest premiere of the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, with Bartók at the piano, in 1938.
As a boy, Rimsky-Korsakov yearned to see the world, a desire fueled by his restricted upbringing (he had left his hometown only three times by the time he was twelve) and by the letters his older brother Voin sent from the Far East, where he was serving in the navy. Young Nikolai fell in love with a sea he had never seen; he devoured books about it, memorized nautical terms, and even rigged up a model brig. Like many of his ancestors—and in obvious emulation of his brother—he set his heart on a career in the navy. But, at the age of seventeen, when his piano teacher introduced him to Balakirev, Cui, and Mussorgsky, he could no longer deny that the pull of music also was strong. By the time he graduated from the College of Naval Cadets in 1856 and was due to set sail on the Almaz for a thirty-month cruise, he confessed that he wanted to be a musician instead of a sailor. Although the ship took him to many distant ports, including New York City and Rio de Janeiro, Rimsky-Korsakov rarely traveled far from home once the voyage was completed, settling instead for the world of his imagination, which he depicted in the fiction of his undeniably potent and atmospheric music.

Rimsky-Korsakov first tried to capture the music of the Orient in his Antar Symphony; having no firsthand experience, he borrowed a French volume of Arab melodies collected in Algiers from his friend Alexander Borodin. He was particularly proud of composing a melody for Antar with “florid oriental embellishments,” and later boasted that “the abundant use of oriental themes lent my composition an odd turn of its own, hardly in wide use until then. . . .” Within the decade, however, Rimsky-Korsakov was to hear oriental music for himself.

Early in July 1874, Rimsky-Korsakov took his wife and young child to Sevastopol on the southern coast of Crimea, across the Black Sea from Constantinople (now Istanbul). From there they traveled to the town of Bakhchisaray, where he marveled at “the coffee houses, the shouts of its vendors, the chanting of the muezzins on the minarets, the services in the mosques, and the oriental music.” Rimsky was intoxicated by the sounds of this otherworldly place. “It was while hearing the gypsy-musicians of Bakhchisaray that I first became acquainted with oriental music in its natural state, and I believe I caught the main feature of its character,” he later reported.

**COMPOSED**
1888

**FIRST PERFORMANCE**
November 3, 1888; Saint Petersburg, Russia. The composer conducting

**FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES**
October 29 & 30, 1897, Auditorium Theatre. Theodore Thomas conducting
July 19, 1936, Ravinia Festival. Willem van Hoogstraten conducting

**MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES**
May 9, 11 & 14, 2013, Orchestra Hall. Mei-Ann Chen conducting
May 10 & 12, 2013, Orchestra Hall. Mei-Ann Chen conducting (Beyond the Score)
August 6, 2015, Ravinia Festival. Rafael Payare conducting

**INSTRUMENTATION**
two flutes and two piccolos, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, snare drum, bass drum, tambourine, tam-tam, harp, strings

**APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME**
47 minutes

**CSO RECORDINGS**
1960. Sidney Harth as soloist, Fritz Reiner conducting. RCA
1969. Victor Aitay as soloist, Seiji Ozawa conducting. Angel
1993. Samuel Magad as soloist, Daniel Barenboim conducting. Erato
Music filled the streets from morning till night—“in front of every coffee house there was continual playing and singing,” he wrote. But seven years later, when he returned to Bakhchisaray, he was stunned to discover that the authorities had cleaned up the streets, and the seductive sounds of the town remained a distant memory. Perhaps hoping to experience some of the local color the place now denied him, he sailed on to Constantinople, where he stayed three days before returning home.

In February 1887, Alexander Borodin died. Rimsky-Korsakov was devastated at the loss of his friend and colleague (he didn’t sleep all night after hearing the news), and within days, he decided to put his own work aside in order to complete Borodin’s famously unfinished opera Prince Igor. Sometime the following winter, while he was immersed in Borodin’s world of Polovtsian chiefs, harem girls, and Turkish invaders, Rimsky-Korsakov conceived his own oriental fantasy—an orchestral work inspired by The Arabian Nights, a collection of Arabic, Persian, and Indian tales that had held an enormous, almost uncanny fascination for many cultures since the ninth century. (The Arabian Nights had circulated throughout the West in Antoine Galland’s French translation since the early eighteenth century.) Sheherazade, as he came to call the work, was composed that summer.

Sheherazade consisted of “separate, unconnected episodes and pictures,” as the composer put it, from The Arabian Nights: snapshots, in other words, of a world he never knew. Sheherazade is a triumph of imagination over experience. It’s a feast of sumptuous colors and brilliant instrumental effects—by the man, after all, who literally wrote the book on orchestration—and it quickly became a favorite romantic showpiece and a landmark in the history of descriptive music.

Rimsky-Korsakov prefaced the score with a brief reminder of the premise behind the world’s first great serial story: to subvert the Sultan Shahriar’s vow to kill each of his wives after the first night, the Sultana Sheherazade spins an intricate web of to-be-continued tales, one per night, for 1,001 nights, ultimately fascinating and winning over the sultan.

By the time he wrote his autobiography, Rimsky-Korsakov shied away from a literal, programmatic reading of the score, denying that it depicted actual characters and episodes from The Arabian Nights. “In the majority of cases, all these seeming ‘leitmotifs’ are nothing but purely musical material, the themes for symphonic development,” he wrote. Originally, he claimed, he hadn’t even planned to give the four movements titles (beyond the musical labels prelude, ballade, adagio, and finale); his student Lyadov convinced him otherwise. The programmatic names he finally chose, however, don’t refer to specific tales in The Arabian Nights but to general scenes—Sinbad sailing the sea, a festival in Baghdad, a ship being dashed against the rocks. (Rimsky-Korsakov decided to omit the titles in the second edition of the score.) He conceded that the violin solo was meant to delineate Sheherazade “as she tells her wondrous tales to the stern sultan,” but the imposing theme with which the score begins wasn’t reserved specifically for the sultan.

“In composing Sheherazade I meant these hints to direct only slightly the listener’s fancy on the path that my own fancy had traveled, and to leave more minute and particular conceptions to the will and mood of each,” Rimsky-Korsakov later wrote. “All I wanted was that the hearer, if he liked the piece as symphonic music, should carry away the impression that it is undoubtedly an oriental narrative of numerous and varied fairy-tale marvels, and not merely four pieces played one after the other and based on themes common to all four.”

Rimsky-Korsakov’s genius is for an art of illusion; it has nothing to do with the precise, note-specific observation of a latter-day ethnomusicologist. One day of sightseeing in Bakhchisaray was sufficient, for his purposes, to “capture the main feature” of oriental music. He sought to depict the Orient of people’s dreams, and that’s why he called the work Sheherazade: “Because this name and the title The Arabian Nights connote in everyone’s mind the East and fairy tales.” With this score, which immediately became a favorite of European and American armchair travelers, Rimsky-Korsakov ensured the power of that identification for years to come.