

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-THIRD 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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Thursday, May 29, 2014, at 8:00

Friday, May 30, 2014, at 1:30

Jaap van Zweden Conductor**Alisa Weilerstein** Cello**Prokofiev**

Symphony-Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 125

Andante

Allegro giusto

Andante con moto—Allegretto—Allegro marcato

ALISA WEILERSTEIN

INTERMISSION**Britten**Suite on English Folk Tunes: *A time there was . . .*, Op. 90

Cakes and Ale

The Bitter Withy

Hankin Booby

Hunt the Squirrel

Lord Melbourne

First Chicago Symphony Orchestra performances

Shostakovich

Symphony No. 9 in E-flat Major, Op. 70

Allegro

Moderato

Presto—

Largo—

Allegretto



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Friday afternoon's concert is endowed by Mrs. Elaine Frank in loving memory of Mr. Zollie Frank.

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Sergei Prokofiev

Born April 23, 1891, Sontsovka, Ukraine.

Died March 5, 1953, Moscow, Russia.

Symphony-Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 125



The very title of this work, itself an inconclusive hybrid—is it a symphony or a concerto?—suggests something of the unusual and complex history of this score. Originally written as a cello concerto and then revised, not once but twice (with different

titles each time), the Symphony-Concerto, in its final form, is the greatest of Prokofiev's last works. When Prokofiev died on March 5, 1953, on the same day as Joseph Stalin—whose front-page obituaries bumped the composer's death notices to the back of the morning papers—he hadn't even heard this work performed.

This music dates from the mid-1930s, when Prokofiev was at work on some of his most popular and successful scores, including *Peter and the Wolf* and *Romeo and Juliet*. But his new cello concerto didn't join their company. The premiere in Moscow in November 1938 was so poorly received that Prokofiev immediately withdrew the work from his catalog—it was never published or performed again. Until 1947, that is, when a slender, enterprising, twenty-year-old cellist named Mstislav Rostropovich managed to get hold of a copy of the concerto and played it, with piano accompaniment, in recital at the Moscow Conservatory.

Prokofiev attended the performance and was so impressed with Rostropovich's playing that he cornered the musician backstage and said that he wanted to revise the concerto for him. First, however, Prokofiev composed a sonata for Rostropovich, the earliest of the four works he wrote for the cellist, each one in turn inspiring the next. As Rostropovich later recalled, "When I played the sonata in C major by Prokofiev, he immediately began composing his Symphony-Concerto. And when I played the Symphony-Concerto, he set about composing the Concertino. Before he finished the Concertino, he had already embarked on his Sonata for Unaccompanied Cello, though he died before finishing it." (Both the concertino and unaccompanied sonata were left incomplete. Rostropovich and composer Dmitri Kabalevsky put the final touches on the concerto; the sonata, a mere fragment, has never been performed or published.)

It was 1950 when Prokofiev finally got around to rewriting the cello concerto as a showcase for Rostropovich. The cellist spent two summers with the composer at an artists' colony near Moscow, revising the piece together, and, in the process becoming intimate friends. (According to Rostropovich's wife, soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, her husband considered Prokofiev "his ideal," and "tried to be like him in everything," even cultivating

COMPOSED

1933 to 1938, as Cello Concerto, op. 58

revised 1950 as Cello Concerto no. 2; subsequently revised as Symphony-Concerto

FIRST PERFORMANCE

December 9, 1954; Copenhagen, Denmark

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

October 19 & 20, 1961, Orchestra Hall. János Starker as soloist, Erich Leinsdorf conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

October 14, 16 & 19, 2004, Orchestra Hall. Han-Na Chang as soloist, Ingo Metzmacher conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

solo cello, two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, celesta, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

37 minutes

his taste in cologne and neckties.) Prokofiev's standard working method was to make a piano score first, indicating the instrumentation in colored pencil. (Rostropovich ultimately inherited the task of deciphering Prokofiev's notation and producing the full orchestral score.)

This turned out to be an unusually extensive renovation, far exceeding all estimates of time and difficulty, and transforming the work almost beyond recognition. The main changes were structural, as if Prokofiev had taken to heart the original assessment of his friend, composer Nikolai Myaskovsky: "good music, but badly shaped." The new work was so new, in fact, despite its wholesale reuse of material, that when Rostropovich introduced it in February 1952, it was called Cello Concerto no. 2.



Rostropovich and Prokofiev

But Prokofiev was still dissatisfied with the concerto, and so, in the months after the premiere, he took the score back to the drawing board one last time, giving it another makeover and changing its name as well. The new Symphony-Concerto was premiered in Copenhagen in December 1954, again with Rostropovich as soloist, but by then Prokofiev had been dead more than a year, and so he never heard his final thoughts on his last important piece.

The new title—*Simfonia-Kontsert* in Russian transliteration—is often misleadingly translated as *Sinfonia concertante*, after the form popular in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, which calls for more than one soloist (Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante* for violin and viola is perhaps the best-known example). But Prokofiev's title was intended to stress that soloist and orchestra are equals and to suggest how a work that had started life as a traditional concerto had grown closer to becoming a symphony. In the end, the piece is something of a hybrid. Its large dimensions and rich orchestral writing are certainly symphonic in stature, but the cello part, which has highly virtuosic music almost nonstop, is also one of the great solo roles in the literature.

The Symphony-Concerto has three movements, beginning, unconventionally, with the slowest. (This was true of the earlier versions of the score as well.) The cello plays in nearly every measure, moving from bold exposition to whispered filigree, and from simple song to technical daring—rapid passages of fireworks, four-note pizzicato chords. The middle movement, which is mostly fast, is by far the longest. It's truly the heart of the concerto, and it's here—almost exactly at the midpoint of the piece—where Prokofiev places a big, tough, dazzling cadenza—a full two pages in the score. One can only guess how often Prokofiev and Rostropovich must have tested this passage, each advising the other on what worked best and what sounded best, what was playable and what wasn't. (In the printed score, Prokofiev offers a few options to make life easier for the performer, labeling them *facilitazione*, since, as he told Rostropovich, "surely no self-respecting musician would want to play a 'simplified' version.") The finale is a loose set of variations—and variations upon variations—complete with another, more modest cadenza and a whirlwind conclusion. ■

—Phillip Huscher

Benjamin Britten

Born November 22, 1913, Lowestoft, Sussex, England.

Died December 4, 1976, Aldeburgh, England.

Suite on English Folk Tunes: *A time there was . . .*, Op. 90



Early in 1933, nineteen-year-old Benjamin Britten happened to hear on the radio “two brilliant folk-song arrangements of Percy Grainger” which, he wrote in his diary, knocked “all the V. Williams and R.O.

Morris arrangements into a cocked-hat.” Although Britten admired Vaughan Williams’s “wonderfully scored” *Tallis* Fantasia, the older composer’s cozy pastoral style was no match for the Australian’s boldly individual and colorful arrangements. Twenty-five years later, Britten finally met Grainger and made several attempts to have him perform at the festival he had founded at Aldeburgh. Their admiration was mutual—Grainger confessed himself “in love with” Britten’s “tragic and inspired” setting of “O Waly, Waly”—but events and ill-health conspired to prevent Grainger appearing at Britten’s festival.

In the meantime, Britten and his partner, the tenor Peter Pears, often performed Grainger’s folk-song arrangements (Britten being a superlative pianist). For the 1966 Aldeburgh Festival, Britten organized a Tribute to Percy Grainger, subsequently recording an album *Salute to Percy Grainger*—himself playing piano and conducting the English Chamber Orchestra and the Ambrosian Singers in various works—which when released in 1969 proved a landmark in raising the profile of Grainger’s music.

Britten’s Suite on English Folk Tunes, his last completed orchestral work, again pays explicit tribute by presenting an entire folk tune, “Lord Melbourne,” which was originally—as Britten’s prefatory note in the score says—“written down in his usual meticulous detail by Percy Grainger, to whose memory the suite is ‘lovingly and reverently’ dedicated.” (The quote marks around “lovingly and reverently”—unexplained by Britten—signify a quote from Grainger’s inscription in his own British folk-music arrangements: “lovingly and reverently dedicated to the memory of Edvard Grieg.”)

Mostly composed late in 1974, Britten’s suite was completed on November 16, less than a week before his own sixty-first birthday. He was by then seriously ill, having endured a less-than-successful heart operation which left him not only enfeebled, but also unable to play the piano. Yet one would hardly know this from music as vigorous as the suite’s opening Cakes and Ale and its penultimate movement, Hunt the Squirrel.

Britten had composed one of its movements as early as December 11, 1966. Hankin Booby, scored for woodwind ensemble and tamburo (military drum), was originally written for the opening of London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall on March 1, 1967. Sounding robust and mischievous in that original context, Hankin Booby was considered for adaptation in a film about a rural Suffolk village’s changing way of life after the First World War. However, Britten’s ill health intervened, and he finally made it the third movement of his Suite on English Folk Tunes.

COMPOSED

1974

FIRST PERFORMANCE

June 13, 1975; Snape, Suffolk

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

These are the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s first performances.

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, percussion, harp, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

14 minutes

It took Britten some time to decide the suite's title—at one stage he considered “Up she goes.” Finally, after hearing a rebroadcast of Pears singing Britten's own song cycle setting of Thomas Hardy, *Winter Words*, the composer decided on his subtitle. The cycle ends with a setting of “Before Life and After,” which opens:

A time there was—as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell—
Before the birth of consciousness
When all went well.

All five movements are based on either English folk tunes, including the finale's “Lord Melbourne,” or country dances, the latter selected from John Playford's seventeenth-century anthology *The Dancing Master*.

Marked “fast and rough,” Cakes and Ale is kick-started by timpani, launching a bouncy string motif based on the dance tune “We'll



Percy Grainger

wed.” Brass, punctuated by side drum, then take up the theme, followed by a scherzando episode for woodwinds before the return of the strings. Over the still scampering strings, woodwinds and horns then introduce a second, almost choralelike theme, “Stepney Cakes and Ale,”

broken up with a solo flourish from each member of the string family—violin, viola (after which trumpets join the merry making), cello, bass, then violin again. Finally, a muted brass recapitulation of the “We'll wed” theme, and the movement peters out with an ascending solo violin.

The Bitter Withy is based on two English folk songs, one of them collected—as the score explicitly states—“by Vaughan Williams at Wimbledon in September 1905 from the singing

of Mr. Hunt.” Might Britten have been belatedly making amends for his youthful contempt of that well-loved composer? Certainly he had started revising several of his opinions of English composers from previous generations, notably Elgar, whose music he conducted in stirring and revelatory performances recorded during the 1960s. Further, during the 1940s, after his return to Britain from his sojourn in the United States, there were hints in some of Britten's works, such as *Rejoice in the Lamb*, that he had absorbed some of Vaughan Williams's sound world. Now, in Bitter Withy, strings and harp spin an obviously pastoral texture, though it is the brief moment when the strings enter a dark-toned unison, accompanied by the tolling of a lone bell, that one senses most acutely a shadow cast by Vaughan Williams.

Hankin Booby starts with a sinister-sounding jig played by oboes and clarinets, each phrase ending in a trill against which the dance melody “Half Hannikin” is heard softly played in unison by pairs of flutes and bassoons: although a major-key melody, any potential brightness this might bring is quite sapped by the tone of the preceding theme. There follows a more perky woodwind idea based on the dance “Mage on a Cree.” The movement ends with an enigmatic major chord.

More rustic and apparently joyous is Hunt the Squirrel, a whirl of rapid fiddle playing, ringing with open strings, in which fragments of the dance tunes “Hunt the Squirrel” and “The Tuneful Nightingale” suggest a riotous rustic gathering brought to a swift end.

With Lord Melbourne, marked “slow and languid,” we reach the heart of the suite, and, on solo English horn, we hear the melody collected by Grainger. As the late English critic Michael Oliver perceptively noted, the suite's “longest movement is subdued, dark, and desolate, with something of protest to its climax.” The movement finally gutters out with a low flute which tentatively finishes the melody. ■

—Daniel Jaffé

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born September 25, 1906, Saint Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), Russia.

Died August 9, 1975, Moscow, Russia.

Symphony No. 9 in E-flat Major, Op. 70



By the end of the Second World War, Shostakovich was not only a national hero, but he also was an international celebrity, due to his Seventh Symphony, the *Leningrad*. Famously written (mostly) in Leningrad during the city's first year of siege, its

propaganda value was instantly recognized.

Copies of the score were flown from the Soviet Union to such high-profile conductors as Henry Wood (then chief conductor of London's Proms) and Arturo Toscanini. The work was even heard in Leningrad itself, still under siege after eleven months and with several thousands having died from starvation: a scratch symphony orchestra was recruited for a performance broadcast on August 9, 1942, demonstrating that the city's spirit had not been crushed.

Shostakovich's next symphony, the bleak and ferocious Eighth, disappointed Soviet officials, who had hoped for a more triumphant sequel, since the war's tide had turned in the Red Army's favor. Realizing that the nightmarish world of the Eighth needed to be counterbalanced, as early as the spring of 1944, Shostakovich told a Moscow journalist of his plans for the Ninth: "I would like to employ not only full orchestra but a choir and soloists, if I can find a suitable text; in any case, I don't want to be accused of drawing presumptuous analogies." What Shostakovich had in mind, of course, was Beethoven's mighty *Choral* Symphony. In subsequent interviews,

he further intimated that his Ninth was to be the triumphal final part to a symphonic trilogy begun by the *Leningrad*. Expectations were high, and, indeed, it seemed Shostakovich was to fulfill them when, in January 1945, he demonstrated to his Moscow Conservatory students the exposition of a new orchestral work. A week later, when asked about the work's progress, he explained that he was making slow progress as the symphony opened with a big tutti and he was writing straight into full score. That month he admitted to his friend, Isaak Glikman:

I am not composing anything, since I live in such appalling conditions. From 6.00 to 18.00 I am deprived of two basic forms of convenience: water and light. It's particularly difficult without these conveniences between 15.00 and 18.00—it's already dark by then. Kerosene lamps give little light and my eyesight is bad. My nerves go to pieces because of this darkness. . . . then at 18.00 they turn on the light, but by that joyful moment my nerves are so tautly wound up that I cannot pull myself together.

Even so, in late April, Shostakovich played about ten minutes of the work on the piano to Glikman, who recalled it as "majestic in scale, in pathos, in its breathtaking motion." Then in July, Shostakovich scrapped that symphony and embarked on writing a draft score of the Ninth as we know it. By August 2, he was in Moscow writing a fair copy of the first movement, completing this three days later. He composed

COMPOSED

1945

FIRST PERFORMANCE

November 3, 1945, Leningrad

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

October 10 & 11, 1946, Orchestra Hall.

Désiré Defauw conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

November 19, 1985, Orchestra Hall.
Francisco Feliciano conducting

July 25, 2012, Ravinia Festival. James
Conlon conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two
clarinets, two bassoons, four horns,
two trumpets, three trombones, tuba,
timpani, percussion, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

27 minutes

the other four movements—first in draft, then in fair copy—at the composers’ House of Creativity in Ivanovo, completing the whole work on August 30.

A possible clue to Shostakovich’s frame of mind is provided in the diary of Daniil Zhitomirsky, who witnessed Shostakovich composing the Ninth in the front garden of his quarters at Ivanovo, on “a board nailed down on top of poles driven into the ground.” Zhitomirsky had met Shostakovich and his wife at the Ivanovo rail station:

On the way back here, Dmitri Dmitriyevich first told me about the “uranium” bomb, of the inconceivable, terrible catastrophe of Hiroshima. . . . He spoke in short quick phrases; the husky, pinched tone of his voice, his absent gaze, and pallid complexion all transmitted his distress. We then walked in silence to his little dacha. I thought in bewilderment about Hiroshima, of the complexities of this moment in time (even though the war had ended for us), and wondered what the near future had in store. I started to give voice to my despondency, but Dmitri Dmitriyevich, his eyes fixed on some point overhead, quickly cut short my lamentations: “Our job is to rejoice!”

Clearly news of Hiroshima’s bombing, which had taken place on August 6, made the prospect of writing a conventional celebratory work even harder to stomach. Yet, it is known that Shostakovich drafted the score of what became the Ninth Symphony in July, some weeks before. Possibly he had written this as a break from the strain of writing a work on which so much expectation was riding; the news of Hiroshima had then resolved him to making this his Ninth Symphony instead of the grandiose work he had hitherto promised.

The opening of its first movement was described approvingly by one of Shostakovich’s colleagues as “Mozart-like,” though its forbear is clearly that of Prokofiev’s *Classical* Symphony. Its second subject is a strutting march, led by piccolo, whose apparently innocent theme gains a darker and more sinister character as it is increasingly taken up by the brass as the movement develops.

The slow second movement starts with a wan clarinet solo supported by cello and bass pizzicato. The strings take up this theme, and the movement becomes increasingly Mahlerian with *Nachtmusik*-style horn fanfares.

In complete contrast is the following scherzo, sparkling and light-footed in the tradition of Tchaikovsky’s Second Symphony or Berlioz’s *Queen Mab* Scherzo. Something of the quality of Italian comic opera is introduced by a swaggering trumpet solo.

This leads without a break into the Largo, pompously started by low trombones and tuba. A solo bassoon, rambling like a morose drunkard, plays a melody vaguely reminiscent of the second movement’s wan lament. Finally, the bassoon appears to pull itself together, launching the finale with a perky and apparently lighthearted theme. Like the first movement’s piccolo theme, this is eventually—after the strings and a curiously oriental-sounding episode played by woodwinds—taken up by the brass to darkly menacing effect. Yet its peroration ends up more like something from a circus ring than a magnificent procession, and the movement finally races to a hectic end. ■

—Daniel Jaffé

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

Daniel Jaffé, author of a biography of Sergei Prokofiev (Phaidon) and the *Historical Dictionary of Russian Music* (Scarecrow Press), currently is researching a biography of Gustav Holst.