

**NORTH SHORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Susan Deaver, Music Director and Conductor  
2008-2009 Season, Concert IV

**“HORIZONS”**

Looking towards NSSO’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season  
Guest Artist: Anton Polezhayev, violinist  
(NSSO Artist-in-Residence 2009-2010)  
at Plainview-Old Bethpage John F. Kennedy High School  
on Saturday evening, June 12, 2010 at 8:00 o’clock

— NOTES ON THE MUSICAL PROGRAM —

**Overture to *Die Fledermaus* (“*The Bat*”)**

by Johann Strauss the Younger (*born in Vienna on October 25, 1825; died in Vienna on June 3, 1899*)

When the great English conductor Sir Thomas Beecham was first introduced to the frolicsome tunes of Johann Strauss’s operetta *Die Fledermaus* (“The Bat”), he recalls his reaction in a memoir entitled *A Mingled Chime*: “Here at last was everything dear to the heart of the average English play-goer, including a large slice of that rowdy humor on the stage which he feels is out of place nowhere. By general consent it was agreed that here were the goods!”

Other praise came from critics, public and fellow composers, including none other than Johannes Brahms, no slouch with a waltz himself (*e.g.* the two volumes of *Liebesliederwalzer*), who wrote after he had heard *Fledermaus* the first time, “Now *there* is a master of the orchestra, a great, great master.” Brahms and Strauss occasionally vacationed in the same resort town near Vienna, each harboring sincere affection for the other’s music, to the extent that Brahms one time autographed the fan of Strauss’s beautiful wife by dashing off a musical bar or two from the principal theme of her husband’s great waltz, *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*, with a handwritten line below it that read, “Not, alas, by Johannes Brahms.”

That was Strauss’s third wife, Adele, but *Fledermaus* was composed for his first wife, Jetty, a light soprano with a gift for the stage. She played the part of Roseline, who is happily married to the mischievous Eisenstein, nicknamed “The Bat” because he has always flitted from social occasion to social occasion. Roseline herself can be counted on to faint with delight, literally, any time she hears the high A of a lyric tenor, particularly a handsome one.

Basically, though, it is Strauss’s genius for melody that lifts *Fledermaus* and other of his most truly inspired music into the realm of the empyrean. He wrote for his beloved city, Vienna, an almost fairy-tale Vienna, a pretty-pretty, never-never Vienna of eternal dance and quivering romance.

*Fledermaus*’s plot is sheer fluff. Roseline’s husband, accused of insulting a minor official, must go to prison for a week. He bids a tearful adieu to his wife, but takes a circuitous route to

jail so as to stop by a splendid evening party where Champagne is flowing and a Russian countess is singing a nostalgic song of her homeland—*that* kind of party—and where Roselinde shows up, with a particularly persistent admirer (a tenor, naturally) in tow. Eventually everyone winds up in the pokey, under the eye of a hilariously drunken jailer; eventually everything is forgiven and explained. Much of this foolishness is touched on, in spirit, at least, through the sublime strains of the overture’s music, Strauss at his melodic, toe-tapping best.

*Die Fledermaus* was finished and first presented on April 5, 1874, at the Theatre-an-der-Wien, as were all of Strauss’s operettas.

At Strauss’s death, in 1899, one of his most vocal admirers proved to be another composer named Strauss: Richard, the creator of tone poems like *Til Eulenspiegel* and operas like *Salome*. He wrote in a touching obituary notice: “How could I have composed my *Rosenkavalier* waltzes without thinking of our laughing genius of Vienna? Of all the God-gifted dispensers of joy, Johann Strauss is to me the most endearing . . . and enduring.

### **Symphonie Espagnole, for solo violin and orchestra, Opus 21**

by Édouard Lalo (*born in Lille, France, on January 27, 1823; died in Paris on April 22, 1892*)

*Allegro non troppo*

*Scherzando: Allegro molto*

*Intermezzo: Allegretto non troppo*

*Andante*

*Rondo: Allegro*

Essentially a violin concerto, Lalo’s sweeping “Spanish Symphony” is one of the earliest in the catalogue of works by 19th-century French composers who were intoxicated at one time or another by the heady white sun and black shadows of the Iberian Peninsula and its Spanish music. The great Spaniard Manuel de Falla once wrote that he wished he could compose anything “half as Spanish” as Frenchman Claude Debussy’s *Ibéria*, and Isaac Albéniz extravagantly admired the entirely French Maurice Ravel’s languorous dance for the funeral procession of an imaginary Spanish princess, *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*.

And there were Emmanuel Chabrier’s triumphant tone poem *España*, Ravel’s opera *L’Heure espagnole* and the orchestral *Rapsodie espagnole*, not to mention *Boléro*, his interpretation of a traditional Spanish dance; there was Jean-Eugène Crèvecoeur’s once-popular *Sérénade espagnole*, Louis Boieldieu’s opera *La fille d’Aragon*, Jules Massenet’s *Le Cid*. Audiences of the time loved them all. Spanish was the musical mood *du jour*.

But Lalo got there first, with his *Symphonie espagnole*, composed in 1874 and given its première by the great Spanish virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate (to whom it was dedicated) the next year, 1875, coincidentally the year of Bizet's quintessentially Spanish opera *Carmen* (and the birth year of Ravel).

At least Lalo came from Spanish stock. None of the other composers had even visited Spain except Debussy who crossed the border to see a few minutes of a bullfight, got sick at the sight and had to be taken home. Lalo was a professional violinist and violist, too. He worshipped Pablo Sarasate. On his writing desk, in his last years when he could afford it, he kept a small copy of J. A. M. Whistler's already famous full-length portrait of the Spanish virtuoso (which now hangs in a Pittsburgh gallery).

Lalo had become a musician over his father's adamant protests, and therefore led a very modest life, supporting himself by playing in orchestras and teaching. But always he did a little composing, too, and some of his violin pieces came to Sarasate's attention. Soon Lalo had finished a violin concerto for him, and Sarasate played the première in 1874. Then followed the *Symphonie espagnole* and, a year or so later, the *Fantaisie norvégienne*, also for violin and orchestra and also a great success. Lalo's fortune was made.

The great Tchaikovsky was among his admirers. "Do you know the *Symphonie Espagnole* by this French composer Lalo?" he wrote to a friend. "This work has given me great enjoyment. It is so fresh and light and contains such piquant rhythms and melodies . . . Lalo takes care to avoid all that is routine; he seeks new forms without trying to be profound, and is more concerned with musical beauty than with tradition."

Lalo's idiom, critic Julian Rushton believes, is "a characteristically French mid-century blend of operatic, balletic and virtuoso styles. The man has a real flair for orchestral color, a lively melodic invention." The Spanish elements in Lalo's music appear most obviously in his melodic contours and no less pervasively in certain recurrent rhythms. One of his favorites is that of a triplet plus a duplet (often heard in the tango).

The glittering orchestral accompaniment in the second movement imitates the guitar while the soloist's melody uses a cross-rhythm, 3/4 straddling the prevailing 3/8. This apparent slowing of motion generates the eloquent middle section.

The third movement is a simple three-part form, the outer sections enclosing a virtuosic display section, while the slow movement, grander and more passionate in its beginning, gradually subsides into tranquillity.

The finale begins like the "Festival Morning" section of Debussy's *Ibéria*, all hopeful anticipation, with a bell motif that becomes the accompaniment for an ensuing Habanera, once again in the triplet-duplet rhythm. The coda is more virtuosic than ever, exploding with brilliance and skyrocket-like pyrotechnics for the soloist.

## **La Procepción del Rocio, Opus 9**

by Joaquin Turina (*born in Seville on December 9, 1882; died in Madrid on January 14, 1949*)

Spanish music critic Federico Sopena once wrote that Seville remained in Turina's blood, even though he did not live there after he was twenty; "his music is full of *sevillanismo* despite any other indication on the page."

Turina's father was a painter, and when little Joaquin was a boy his father bought him a toy accordion which he carried everywhere. Music was his favorite subject in school, and eventually with his parents' blessing he abandoned a brief experiment with a medical education to return to music.

He was still a student in the National Schola when he composed *La Procesión del Rocio* in 1913. It would have been difficult for anyone to get a performance at the Teatro Real in Madrid, much less a young unknown provincial. But Turina was the exception that proves the rule: his *Procesión del Rocio* (Procession in the Mist) had its première there by the Madrid Symphony Orchestra on March 30, 1913, conducted by the renowned Enrique Fernández Arbós who led the orchestra for more than 30 years and made it the finest concert ensemble in the country. (Arbós conducted the first performance in Spain of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and successfully orchestrated several numbers of Isaac Albéniz's piano suite *Iberia*.)

Turina's *Procesión del Rocio* (*Rocio* is a place of religious pilgrimage near Seville) was dedicated to Arbós; its première performance was so spectacular that it had to be repeated on the spot.

The work is roughly divided into two sections, the first "*Triana en Fiesta*" is in the seductive rhythms of the Sevillanas, and the second "*La Procesión*" assumes the thrillingly ordered movement of a march. Both parts are orchestrated with amazing confidence and a verve that belies Turina's youth when he completed the music. And the entire work is permeated, as Sopena foresaw, with the intense white sun and deep black shadows characteristic of the southern city of Seville.

## **Festival Overture 1812, Opus 49**

by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (*born on May 7, 1840, in Votinsk, District of Viatka, Russia; died on November 6, 1893, in Saint Petersburg*)

On September 7, 1812, seventy-five miles west of Moscow, near a town named Borodino, Napoléon's French forces met those of General Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov in the only concerted stand made by Russia against the seemingly invincible French army. The Battle of Borodino saw casualties estimated as high as 100,000, and did not result in victory for either side. It did, however, break the back of the hitherto confident French invasion.

With severely depleted resources and over-extended supply lines, Napoléon's crippled forces moved into Moscow, which pathetically surrendered without resistance. Expecting only capitulation from the displaced Tsar Alexander I, the French instead found themselves in a barren, desolate and icily inhospitable city which had been razed to the ground by the retreating Russian Army.

Deprived of winter quarters, Napoléon found it necessary to retreat. But the canny Russians made this military withdrawal far from easy. Well into December, the French faced several overwhelming obstacles on its long retreat: famine, freezing temperatures, and Russian forces who though fading in strength still barred the way out of the country. All but abandoned by Napoléon, his Grande Armée found itself reduced to one-tenth its original size by the time it reached Poland. Worse was to come.

The weather had turned hideously against the French; the Russians added their malefication by destroying what was left of their own food, so that the French had absolutely nothing to feed themselves with. The Russians, inured by centuries of near-starvation under one Tsar after another, were used doing without food; the French presumably thought themselves above that sort of thing. Wells were poisoned; pack animals disappeared. The French army of more than a half-million battle-hardened soldiers and twelve hundred state-of-the-art firearms, cannons and artillery pieces, slunk and dragged themselves back to Paris utterly exhausted and depressed. They had brought 1800 horses with them to Russia; they had only 600 when they returned.

Almost seventy years later, Napoléon was only a bad memory, Alexander I a handful of grey ashes long since at rest. But Alexander II, two tsars later, remembered. In 1880, through Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior, he commissioned an entire festival to commemorate the glory of heroic Russian victory-in-defeat, the ignominy of the French disaster, a failure that had been felt around the world. The festival was to take place in the Cathedral with special events in the Moscow Arts and Industry Museum, whose vast exhibition hall could hold many thousands of spectators.

Tchaikovsky's friend and mentor, Nicolai Rubinstein, the director of the Moscow Conservatory, suggested that Piotr Ilyich might take the opportunity to compose a grand musical work for the festivities. He started work on October 12, 1880, and finished it six weeks later.

He later indicated that his music tried to depict both sides of the dramatic 1812 campaign, Not surprisingly, the Russian peasantry occupies a central place in his scheme. Throughout those bleak days, the Russian Orthodox Patriarch of All the Russias, who knew that the Russian army was in sad shape and could put up only a token defence, sagely called on the common people all over the countryside to pray—for themselves, their country's deliverance, everlasting peace for all.

A somber opening hymn echoes their heartfelt pleas for divine intervention, followed by ominous notes of the worsening conflict, along with the distant strains of *La Marseillaise*, the French anthem. We hear sudden skirmishes as the villagers continue to pray; both national anthems are heard, with the French tune to the fore. When the fighting intensifies, people stream from their churches and meadows to flee in the direction of Moscow. Now *La Marseillaise* is

heard in counterpoint to Russian folk tunes, as the mighty armies clash on the bleak plains west of Moscow. When the city falls, all seems hopeless but the hymn-singing is heard again, just as the Divine Presence seems to intervene miraculously, causing a glacial freeze which the French cannot deal with. (We can even hear the winter winds in all their tempestuous force.) The French cannons cake in the ice and are captured by the Russians and turned against them. Church bells begin to peal across the land, cannons are fired, the citizens celebrate their deliverance from “their treacherous and cruel enemies.”

In the interests of full disclosure, it must be said that although *La Marseillaise* was chosen as the French national anthem in 1795, it was banned by Napoléon in 1805, so it could not possibly have been heard in 1812. However it was reinstated in 1879, the year before Tchaikovsky’s Overture was commissioned, so he would undoubtedly have thought its use legitimate. Similarly, *God Save the Tsar*, also much heard here, was not the Russian anthem in 1812, either; there was no anthem until 1815, at which time until 1833 the anthem became *Molitva russkikh* “Prayer of the Russians,” sung to the tune of England’s *God Save the Queen*, or our own *America, ‘Tis of Thee*.

It was planned that the première would be performed in the square before the Cathedral, with a brass band to reinforce the orchestra, the Cathedral bells to be supplemented by a huge array of bells from all Moscow’s churches, and elaborate cannon-fire switched on electrically. Perhaps this was too ambitious a plan; in any case, it did not take place. Also, the assassination of Alexander II that March effectively deflated much of the enthusiasm for the project, and the first performance of Tchaikovsky’s music did not take place until 1882 in the Arts and Industry Exhibition Hall, with the score played using conventional orchestration.

Meanwhile, Tchaikovsky struck a slightly whining note by letter to his generous patron Natasha von Meck, widow of a wealthy railroad engineer, writing that he was “not, after all, a concocter of festival pieces,” and that his piece would be “very loud and noisy, but [without] artistic merit, because I wrote it without warmth and without love.” Ironically it has turned out to be the work that made him a rich, rich man, and his estate a handsome affair indeed. The *Festival Overture 1812*, popular ever since it was first heard—even without cannon and church-bells—remains one of the most frequently performed and recorded works in his or anyone’s entire catalogue.

—*Musical annotations specially written by Clair W. Van Ausdall*  
*for Maestra Susan Deaver and the North Shore Symphony Orchestra*