

MONTEREY SYMPHONY

75

2022

Program Notes

by Dr. Alicia Mastromonaco

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Claude Debussy

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, L. 86



French composer Claude Debussy sought inspiration in a wide variety of media, both musical and extra-musical. In the case of *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, Debussy was so deeply moved by Stéphane Mallarmé's poem of the same name, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, that he decided to interpret the work within an orchestra. In the process, Debussy reimagined what timbres, or musical sound colors, an orchestra could create, and innovated what was possible for this ensemble setting.

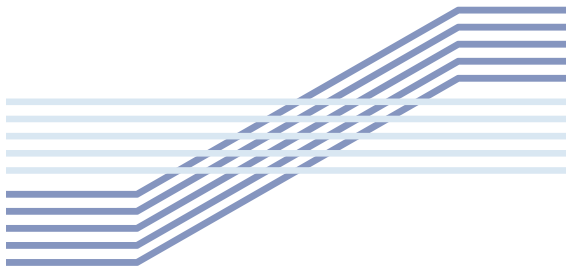
Mallarmé's poem, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, was written in 1865 and revised a decade later, but it was not until the 1880s that Debussy first read it. He composed the work from 1892-1894, and revised it over the next twenty years. Clearly, he had a lot to say about Mallarmé's eclogue, or

short, pastoral poem. The work opens with one of the most famous flute solos in the repertoire, a sinewy, sensuous melody. It is the musical evocation of Mallarmé's words: "this enervating swoon/ Of heat, which stifles all fresh dawn's resistance/ Allows no splash of water but that which my flute/ Pours into chord-besprinkled thickets..." Debussy did not compose a line-for-line rendition of the poem, but wanted to evoke the emotions of the words.

The work was premiered in Paris in December 1894, with Gustave Doret conducting the Société National de Musique. Mallarmé, who attended the concert, was so moved by the concert that he wrote another poem about the experience: "Sylvan spirit, if with your primal breath/ Your flute sounds well,/ Hear now the radiance/ When Debussy plays." 

Robert Schumann

Introduction and *Allegro Appassionato* in G Major, Op. 92



Robert Schumann and his wife, Clara, settled in Dresden from 1845-1850, where Robert experienced the most musically productive period of his life. However, it was also during this time that Europe was experiencing a time of great unrest, culminating in the revolution of 1848-1849. Disenfranchised citizens banded together to demand more freedom from the aristocracies that ruled over them. The Schumanns fled Dresden to avoid the violence which had already taken a terrible toll on Robert's already fragile mental health. It was during this time that Robert Schumann wrote the *Introduction and Allegro Appassionato* in G Major, for Piano and Orchestra.

The piece was composed over the course of nine days in 1849. Schumann sketched the piece from September 18-20 and finished the entire work by September 26th. The piece was written with Clara in mind, and is reminiscent of her own compositional style, with beautiful, tender melodies. Clara Schumann, a famous concert pianist as well as composer, premiered the work in 1850

at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. She said she was very passionate about the work but felt that she did not do justice to the piece at the premiere. Perhaps for this reason, or because of the composition's more subtle nature, the piece received a lukewarm reception at first. Because it was written for Robert Schumann's beloved wife, it does not contain the razzle dazzle found in contemporary piano concertos, but is more small-scale and intimate.

The piece opens with the piano, buoyed by the drone of a solo cello. It is followed by a low, nostalgic clarinet solo, then a soaring solo horn that travels into a high tessitura. The piece vacillates between tender, nostalgic, flowing melodies and militaristic brass accentuations. These brass calls are not brash, but short refrains, as if harkening back to the violence of the 1848 revolutions. Yet, out of the fear and difficulty of this time in Robert Schumann's life we now have a lovey short solo piano piece that speaks more to the love between husband and wife during a period of continental instability. 



Witold Lutoslawski *Paganini Variations*

Niccoló Paganini's twenty-fourth caprice for solo violin is the most famous of the nineteenth-century virtuoso-composer's many caprices and concerti for his instrument and has been reworked and revisited in a variety of contexts. Most famous among these reworkings would be Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*, for piano and orchestra, a canonical work of the piano concerto repertoire. Although you will hear Rachmaninoff's music later in the program, this less-known reworking of Paganini's caprice is nonetheless exciting and gripping.

Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski lived in Warsaw during the Nazi occupation of Poland during WWII, where he supported himself and his mother by playing piano in several cafes across the city. Lutoslawski also played a piano duo with his friend Andrzej Panufik. They played a wide variety of styles from classical music to free jazz together. The impetus

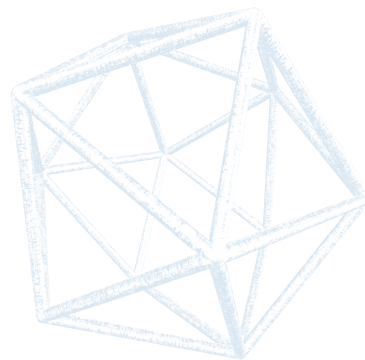
to arrange a piano duo version of Paganini's caprice, according to Lutoslawski, came from the harpist of the Warsaw Philharmonic, Markiewicz, who was also a waiter at the Aria café. Lutoslawski obliged, first arranging his version for two pianos. Eventually, in 1977, he started on an orchestral arrangement of the variations, which was premiered with the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra on November 18, 1979, with Brian Priestman conducting and Felicja Blumental as soloist.

The piece is immediately recognizable as Paganini's original music, but Lutoslawski reharmonizes many portions of the piece, and plays with orchestral tone colors and techniques. This is not the dazzlingly technical solo violin caprice of Paganini or the lush, romantic Rachmaninoff version, but something that is simultaneously much more modern and yet just as virtuosic in the technical passages, and beautifully emotional in the slow variation. 



Sergei Rachmaninoff

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27



Just as Schumann moved to Dresden in search of musical inspiration, so too did Sergei Rachmaninoff move his family there from Moscow sixty years later, in 1906. The Russian composer was suffering from a years-long depression after the disastrous premiere of his first symphony, and had gone through therapy, and resigned from his conducting post at the Bolshoi. In Dresden, Rachmaninoff hoped to rekindle his love for composing and start a new chapter.

Rachmaninoff began composing his second symphony in complete secrecy in January of 1907, and eventually completed the score in the summer of that year. He premiered the work in 1908, himself conducting the score. It was highly praised by the critics and the public alike, although one pervasive criticism that haunted the composer was that the symphony was entirely too long. The original symphony was nearly an hour long, but he was begrudgingly persuaded to make numerous cuts to the work,

sometimes making it as short as thirty-five minutes long. Since the 1970s, the work has generally been performed in its entirety, today you will hear selections during this performance.

The work is romantic, not modernist, which was problematic in a time when serialism, experimentation, and avant-gardism were praised in contemporary compositions. However, with the passage of time and ever-changing musical tastes, the Second Symphony is valued today precisely for its romanticism and beauty.

The symphony opens mysteriously, with instruments entering slowly to introduce the motto theme that repeats throughout the movement. Listeners might recognize the melody of the second movement from several film scores, and one cannot forget Eric Carmen's 1976 hit, "Never Gonna Fall in Love Again." The finale builds to a cymbal-filled coda, as if Rachmaninoff finally recovered from his traumatic First Symphony to proclaim a triumphant win in his Second Symphony. 

Dr. Alicia Mastromonaco

Assistant Principal horn



Alicia has played with the Monterey Symphony since 2007. She is also a member of the Carmel Bach Festival and Marin Symphony and plays in orchestras across the Bay Area. A San Francisco native, she began her music studies at age seven on the piano, sang in the San Francisco Girls Chorus, and took up the horn in middle school when she was given her uncle's old single B-flat Conn to try out (and fell in love with the instrument). Alicia earned Bachelor of Music degrees in Horn Performance and Musicology from Boston University, then did graduate work at the Universität der Künste Berlin before returning to California to continue her studies. She earned a Master of Music at University of California, Los Angeles in Horn performance, and a Master of Arts and PhD in Musicology from University of California, Santa Barbara.

Her dissertation, "Breakdown on the Freeway Philharmonic: Understanding the Causes and Effects of Regional Orchestra Bankruptcies in the San Francisco Bay Area," traces the history of the Oakland and San José Symphonies from their inception through their bankruptcies in 1988 and 2002, respectively, and provides socio-cultural analysis of the many factors facing the groups that led to their demise. She lives with her husband and two cats in El Cerrito and enjoys the many beautiful hiking trails just outside their door.

