

Ravel, Shostakovich & Stravinsky

Friday, January 11 – 7:30 pm

Saturday, January 12 – 8 pm

Jean-Marie Zeitouni, conductor

Stewart Goodyear, piano

Robin Doyon, trumpet

Afterthoughts, Friday post-performance, Main Lobby with Jean-Marie Zeitouni, Stewart Goodyear & Robin Doyon

Symphony Prelude, Saturday 7 pm, Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

STRAVINSKY

Jeu de cartes (“Card Game”) – **Ballet in Three Deals** (23’)*

First Deal: Alla breve – Moderato assai – Tranquillo

Second Deal: Alla breve – Marcia – Variazioni I-V – Coda – Marcia

Third Deal: Alla breve – Valse – Presto – Tempo del principio

SHOSTAKOVICH

Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and Strings in C minor, Op.35 (22’)*

Allegro moderato – Allegro vivace

Lento

Moderato

Allegro con brio

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

HÉTU

Sur les rives de Saint-Maurice (15’)*

RAVEL

Le tombeau de Couperin (25’)*

Prelude

Fugue

Forlane

Rigaudon

Menuet

Toccata

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

***Jeu de cartes* ("Card Game") – Ballet in Three Deals**

Igor Stravinsky

(b. Oranienbaum, 1882 / d. New York, 1971)

First performed: April 27, 1937 in New York

Last ESO performance: May 2004

A lifelong lover of card games, especially poker, Igor Stravinsky came up with the idea of a ballet in which the cards would be the characters back in the 1920s, when he was still living in Paris. He couldn't interest anyone else in the idea, however, until 1936 in New York, when choreographer George Balanchine commissioned Stravinsky for the newly-formed American Ballet Company. The result was *Jeu de cartes* ("Card Game," or "Card Party"), staged at the Met the following year. "In Card Game, Stravinsky and I attempted to show that the highest cards – the kings, queens, and jacks – in reality have nothing on the other side," Balanchine has said. "They are big people, but they can easily be beaten by small cards. Seemingly powerful figures, they are actually mere silhouettes."

The ballet is in three "deals," each one a round of poker. Each shuffle of the deck restores the music to a home key of B-flat, and the music springs from that. There is an intended similarity to the music that starts each "deal" to the opening, (supposedly) "fate" motif of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. In the first deal, one player loses, the other two both have straights, but one hand holds the Joker – the main character of the ballet. In the second deal, the player with the Joker wins with four Aces. In the final deal, the Joker, at the head of a royal flush in spades, is finally bested by a royal flush of hearts. Snippets and references to other works abound throughout the lighthearted score.

Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and Strings in C minor, Op.35

Dmitri Shostakovich

(b. St. Petersburg, 1906 / d. Moscow, 1975)

First performance: October 15, 1933 in Leningrad

Last ESO performance: June 2010

Dmitri Shostakovich's *First Piano Concerto* was composed in 1933, and was the first work he wrote following the pivotal opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk*. In 1936, this opera would lead to the composer being charged with the potentially fatal crime of "formalism" by the Soviet regime, forcing Shostakovich to alter his compositional style significantly, lest he invite imprisonment or worse. So this concerto,

scored for piano with the addition of a prominent solo trumpet and strings, is one of the last of his works in which he still felt he had artistic free rein. It is also one of his most deliberately humorous works, and was certainly influenced by the neo-classical style that other composers, most notably Stravinsky, were beginning to explore.

Piano and trumpet have the first say in the work, ushering in a piano passage at first moody, but soon broadening out to an excited urgency in piano and strings. The trumpet intrudes with fanfare-like calls, as if commenting on the bristling piano's manic energy. The moodiness of the opening returns at the end, leading into the slow second movement – a waltz in A-B-A form begun by strings alone. It is nearly a minute and a half before the piano enters, sparsely adding to the string measures with left and right hand playing identical material an octave apart. Then the piano takes over, rhapsodizing its own material in the central section as the strings add to the emotional mood. The trumpet finally enters nearly two-thirds into the movement, playing a muted solo over the strings as the waltz theme returns.

The third movement is brief – a Moderato section begun as a cadenza for the piano, joined soon after by a hauntingly beautiful theme in the strings. Piano and strings come together for the last measures of the movement, which proceeds without a pause into the finale. Shostakovich's early work as a silent film accompanist surely had some influence on the piano passages of this brisk and frantic music, which often has the feel of a cinematic chase or fight scene. Piano, strings, and trumpet all seem to release some pent-up, madcap cascade of colourful figures; the mood is irrepressible. In the middle, the music slows to allow the trumpet a playful, lyrical solo with some faux-Spanish touches. The manic mood soon reclaims the field, however, and the work comically concluding with a few false endings and a wonderfully over-the-top sense of occasion.

Sur les rives de Saint-Maurice (On the Shores of the Saint-Maurice)

Jacques Hétu

(b. Trois-Rivières, Québec, 1938 / d. Saint-Hippolyte, Québec, 2010)

First performance: September 2008 in Trois-Rivières

Last ESO performance: May 2010

Program note by the composer:

This work was commissioned by the Orchestre symphonique de Trois-Rivières to commemorate the 375 anniversary of the founding of the city. It is dedicated to Jacques Lacombe.

Prologue: Festive fanfare. Magnificent landscape and swirling waters: the river splits into three to create the City. Night falls. **Former Times:** At dawn, at the edge of the woods by the river, a hymn announces the arrival of the explorers and missionaries. Then come bird songs presaging those of the Amerindians. All assemble for a procession that quickly dissolves into the mists. **Modern Times:** Daybreak. A stroll upstream along the river banks. Gentle flow of water, then the roar of waterfalls. Initial sounds of the Forges in the distance. The din grows slowly, then blazes forth. The fires and brilliant flashes from the

blast furnace project terrifying shadows, producing the “devil’s fountain.” **Epilogue:** Calm is restored. Remembrance of the ancestors. Return to the tumult of the Festive City.

The musical elements of this symphonic poem are juxtaposed in four sections further divided into two parts played without pause: **A – 1) (Allegro)** – Festival Fanfare (brass and percussion) – Transition: nocturnal mood. **2) (Allegretto)** – March-like character for the Hymn of the Ancestors (bassoons and clarinets) - The sound of birds (woodwinds) - String figuration symbolizes movement of the waters. Song of the Amerindians (English horn). Short development in a crescendo to the return of the two superimposed themes constituting the *tutti* for the procession; decrescendo during the coda. **B – 3) (Allegro)** - Luminous colours in the orchestra present the Forge motif in the woodwinds. Canonic episodes interspersed with horn calls. Transition: the approaching clamour culminates in an outburst from the trumpets. Development of the Forge motif, joyfully proclaimed by the horns. **4) (Moderato):** Nostalgic reminiscence of the Hymn of the Ancestors (strings). Gradual return of the brass. Varied repeat of the opening fanfare (**Più allegro**) - A final energetic statement of the Hymn, followed by the coda (**Vivace**).

Le tombeau de Couperin

Maurice Ravel

(b. Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, 1875 / d. Paris, 1937)

First performance of original piano version

First performance of orchestral version: February 28, 1920 in Paris

This is the ESO premiere of a version with all six movements orchestrated

There are many contrasting threads interweaving throughout *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel. Firstly, there is the title, indicating an homage to the French baroque master François Couperin (1668-1733) – and this homage is displayed in the work’s use of baroque forms. Secondly, beyond the work’s title dedicatee, each movement of the work (the six-movement suite was originally written for piano solo) was further dedicated to friends of Ravel’s who had lost their lives in World War One. Another contrast is found in the work’s musical language. While certainly charmingly “old-fashioned,” this is still music by Ravel, post-romantic and fully arrived in the 20th century. Its piano-version premiere in 1919 was the first public appearance of Ravel following the war, and while much of the sweet is carefree and capricious, the feelings of loss that must have been so keen in the composer show in the contrastingly tender and melancholy Menuet movement.

Ravel orchestrated four of the original piano movements into an orchestral suite not long after the piano version’s first appearance. And the lack of the other two movements was something keenly felt by tonight’s conductor, Jean-Marie Zeitouni. “I was always very fond of the Ravel suite of six pieces for *Le tombeau de Couperin* and was somehow not fulfilled by playing the four movement usual suite, although masterfully orchestrated by Ravel himself,” he told *Signature* magazine.

Mr. Zeitouni speculated that the challenges of orchestrating the fugue and toccata movements were perhaps the reason Ravel never got around to doing it himself. Tonight's performance features the four movements Ravel orchestrated in their original orchestration, with arrangements done by others of the other two movements.

Program notes © 2019 by D.T. Baker, except as noted