



University of Georgia Symphony Orchestra

Thursday
March 8 2018
8:00 p.m.

conductor **Mark Cedel**
assistant conductor **Jean Gómez**

PROGRAM

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Suite Op. 80

Prélude
Entr'acte
Fileuse
La mort de Mélisande

Beethoven (1770-1827) Symphony No. 8, Op. 93, F Major

Allegro vivace e conbrio
Allegretto scherzando
Tempo di minuetto
Allegro vivace

INTERMISSION

Béla Bartók Concerto for Orchestra

Introduzione (Andante non troppo – Allegro vivace)
Giuoco delle coppie (Allegro scherzando)
Elegia (Andante, non troppo)
Intermezzo interrotto (Allegretto)
Finale (Presto)

HODGSON CONCERT HALL

Program Notes

By Steven Ledbetter

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Pelléas et Mélisande, Suite of incidental music to Maeterlinck's tragedy, Op. 80

Fauré composed incidental music for an English production of Maeterlinck's Pelléas et Mélisande between May 16 and June 5, 1898; this was premiered at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London, on June 21, 1898, with Fauré conducting. Three movements, the Prélude, Fileuse, and the Molto Adagio, were published in 1901, with a dedication to the Princesse Edmond de Polignac, as the Suite from Pelléas et Mélisande, Op. 80. He added the Sicilienne for a new edition in 1909; it had been composed in 1895 as a work for cello and piano and was orchestrated in 1898 for the incidental music. The three movement Suite received its first performance on February 3, 1902 at a Lamoureux Concert in Paris under the direction of Camille Chevillard; André Messager conducted the premiere of the four movement Suite on December 1, 1912. The Suite is scored for two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, harp, and strings. Approximate performance time is eighteen minutes.

Fauré was a long time coming into his own as a composer who could draw an audience. Even in his fifties, though he was highly regarded by cognoscenti as a creator and teacher, he was in no sense a “popular” composer. Much of his music gained a hearing only in the salons of cultivated aristocrats like the Princess Edmonde de Polignac, whose activities as a patron of advanced composers lasted for decades. (Stravinsky dedicated works to her in the '20s.) Fauré also had a group of devoted English friends who sponsored performances of his music in London, so he spent a substantial part of



every year from 1892 to 1900 in the British capital. Thus it was that when he met the famous actress, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, at the home of a mutual friend, Frank Schuster, in 1898, she commissioned him to write incidental music for a production she was planning of Maurice Maeterlinck's symbolist drama *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Prince of Wales Theatre.

There had been only one performance of the play in its original French, on May 17, 1893, and it had resulted in general incomprehension. Claude Debussy was in the audience, though, and he began at once to work on an opera, which was not to be performed until 1902. Several other composers have been attracted to *Pelléas* – Schoenberg and Cyril Scott for orchestral tone poems, Sibelius for incidental music – but Fauré is the only one not to have written his score in the shadow of Debussy's great opera, and, ironically, he wrote it for a production not in the original French but in an English translation.

Fauré was notoriously uninterested in the process of orchestration. Preferring to devote his attention to the creation of the abstract musical concepts, he left the scoring to his student Charles Koechlin, who scored the seventeen numbers of the incidental music in May, 1898, and prepared a fair copy for Fauré to use at the London

performances. Koechlin scored for a pit orchestra of modest proportions. Later, when arranging the movements to be included in the Op. 80 suite, Fauré added extra parts for second oboe, second bassoon, and third and fourth horns. He also made a number of subtle changes in the orchestration throughout and substantially rescored the climaxes for the larger ensemble, so that we may fairly speak of a Koechlin Fauré orchestration. The resulting score, dedicated to the Princess de Polignac, has turned out to be Fauré's most important symphonic work.

The air of charming reticence that runs through much of Fauré's music is equally to be found in his incidental music for Maeterlinck; it is an appropriate mood for a play in which virtually nothing happens, in which every effort to do anything leads to tragedy. The first movement serves as the prelude for the play, painting its misty colors with a few dramatic outbursts that may hint at the impetuous Golaud. The movement ends with a transition to the opening scene of the play (in which Golaud, lost while hunting, comes across the mysterious Mélisande by a fountain deep in the woods); even before the overture ends, we hear Golaud's hunting horn signaling his arrival.

The second movement, sometimes called *La Fileuse* (*The Spinner*) served as the entr'acte before Act III; its nearly constant triplet turn provides the background hum of the spinning wheel. The *Sicilienne*, heard before Act II, is characterized by the rocking rhythm of that delicate Italian dance known as the *siciliano*. All is grace and gentle reflection, entirely appropriate to the mysterious world of the play – even though this movement was composed independently five years earlier!

The final *Molto Adagio* – which introduced Act V – is a quiet, touching depiction of the death of Mélisande. Though Fauré certainly never thought of the Suite as a symphony, it remains his best known and most frequently performed symphonic composition and all we are likely to hear of the seventeen selections composed as incidental music, unless

someone should undertake a complete revival of the play with Fauré's gentle, fragile, mysterious score.

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 8 in F Major, Op. 93

Beethoven composed the Eighth Symphony in 1812; it was first performed, in Vienna, on February 27, 1814. The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, plus timpani and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-six minutes.

Beethoven composed his Eighth Symphony in tandem with the Seventh. Some of the sketches for both works appear together in a manuscript known as the Petter sketchbook. He apparently liked the challenge and the change of pace that comes with working on two very different pieces at the same time. Indeed, he had already done the same thing with the Fifth and Sixth symphonies. But though the two new symphonies were finished almost together, the Seventh was premiered on December 8, 1813, about two months before the Eighth, which was not heard until February 27 following (unlike the Fifth and Sixth, which had been premiered on the same concert in 1808).

The premiere of the Seventh had been one of the most successful concerts of Beethoven's life, establishing him without question as the greatest living composer – though the work that truly ignited the audience's enthusiasm on that occasion was the potboiler *Wellington's Victory*, also being heard for the first time. When Beethoven premiered the Eighth two months later, he sandwiched it between repeats of the Seventh and *Wellington's Victory*. Under the circumstances, the Seventh, a far longer work, overwhelmed the new score with its sheer visceral energy. A letter in which Beethoven offered both symphonies to an English publisher seems to patronize the later work somewhat, since



he describes them as “a grand symphony in A major (one of my most excellent works) and a smaller symphony in F major.” But size alone is not the central factor here. If Beethoven could call the Eighth a smaller work, he surely meant so only in the objective sense of the number of measures contained within it. When Czerny once remarked that the Eighth was much less popular than the Seventh, Beethoven replied gruffly, “That’s because it’s so much better.”

Surprisingly enough this jovial symphony was composed in large part during a period of family strife, when Beethoven went to Linz to interfere in the private life of his thirty five year old brother Johann, who had recently allowed his young housekeeper to move in with him. Beethoven, a complete puritan in matters sexual (and possibly jealous, since he never had a woman in his life), was outraged by the situation and obtained a police order that the girl return to Vienna by a certain date. Johann evaded the issue by marrying her, but not before there had been an ugly confrontation between the two brothers. During this tense period, Beethoven was finishing the jovial Eighth!

The opening movement is small in length compared to its sibling, the Seventh, but it is full of events. The opening phrases form a complete melody (how rare that is for Beethoven!), but immediately after the cadence the next phrases open out and grow in the most astonishing way. False leads cheerfully undermine the tonal solidity that Beethoven had been at such pains to establish in the opening bars, seeming to settle in to the highly unorthodox key of D major (instead of

the dominant, C) for the secondary theme. But scarcely has the theme started before it falters, suddenly aware of its *faux pas*, and swings around to the expected dominant.

The development is one of Beethoven's most masterful demonstrations of musical timing. At first he simply marks time with a rhythmic vamp in the violas, jumping up and down an octave. The basic melodic idea turns out to be the very first measure of the symphony, unheard since its single earlier appearance. Now it dominates the discussion. The development is a long crescendo over its entire length. The volume increases gradually; at the same time phrase lengths become progressively shorter, so that things appear to be moving faster and faster, until the movement culminates in the blazing return to the home key, while the bass instruments proclaim the principal theme. The recapitulation is quite straightforward until the Coda, when a bassoon (recalling the leaping octaves heard at the beginning of the development) leads into a new harmonic world, another crescendo, and a new version of the main theme in the wrong key. After a solid return to the tonic, the orchestra fades out delightfully, leaving one final salute to the first measure in the bass at the very last instant.

The second movement is a humorous homage to Beethoven's friend Mälzel, the inventor of the metronome, a device that Beethoven found invaluable in giving composers, for the first time, a way to specify precise tempos for their music. The cheerful, jesting movement is filled with humorous touches (including a suggestion at the end that the mechanical marvel has broken down). Its *scherzando* marking makes it rather faster than a slow movement was expected to be.

Beethoven compensates by making his next movement – for which we expect a rollicking scherzo – *Tempo di Menuetto*, a marking he had long since ceased using in his symphonies. This movement particularly is responsible for the symphony's reputation as a Haydnesque “throwback.”

Having held his horses back, so to speak, for three movements, Beethoven lets them have their head in the merry rush of the rondo like tune that seems about to come to a close on an normal dominant C when it is suddenly jerked up to *C sharp*, only to have the unexpected note drop away as quickly as it had arrived, apparently without consequence. The same thing happens at the recapitulation, and though the bubbling high spirits leave us little time to worry about details, the sheer obtrusiveness of that note lingers in the ear, demanding consideration. The questions are answered in the immense Coda, where the obtrusive C sharp note returns with harmonic consequences, generating a new and distant tonal diversion that must be worked out before we can return safely home. At this pace, Beethoven's cleverness can only leave us breathless with delight at his exhilarating wit.

Béla Bartók

Concerto for Orchestra

The Concerto for Orchestra was commissioned in the spring of 1943 by Serge Koussevitzky through the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in memory of Natalie Koussevitzky. Bartók composed the work between August 15 and October 8, 1943; Koussevitzky led the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the first performances on December 1 and 2, 1944. The Concerto for Orchestra is scored for three flutes (third doubling piccolo), three oboes (third doubling English horn), three clarinets (third doubling bass clarinet), three bassoons (third doubling contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets (with a fourth trumpet marked ad lib.), three trombones, tuba, timpani, side drum, bass drum, tam-tam, cymbals, triangle, two harps, and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-six minutes.

Early in the 1940s, with a world war raging in Europe, Bartók immigrated to the United States, where he had a position doing research on recordings of eastern European

folk songs housed at Columbia University. He had all but given up composition during the preceding years, depressed by the state of Europe and by his own financial insecurity. Bartók enjoyed his work with the folk materials at Columbia, but he was painfully aware that his position there was only temporary, and he kept casting around for lectureships, concerts, and other ways of earning a living.

Worse, he had begun to have a series of irregular high fevers that the doctors were unable to diagnose, but which turned out to be the first indication of leukemia. By early 1943, the state of his health and the fact that Americans showed little interest in his music brought him to a low point. He insisted that he never wanted to compose again. The medical men were unable to do much, yet powerful medicine that spring came not from a doctor, but rather from a conductor – Serge Koussevitzky.

Violinist Joseph Szigeti had told Koussevitzky of Bartók's situation, warning him that the proud composer would not accept anything remotely smacking of charity. Koussevitzky therefore offered work: \$1000 to write a new orchestral piece with a guarantee of a performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The commission was a tonic for the ailing composer; at once he was filled with ideas for a new composition, which he composed in just eight weeks – August 15 to October 8, 1943 – while resting under medical supervision at a sanatorium at Lake Saranac in upstate New York.

Throughout his American years, Bartók found no reason to feel that his music had struck any sort of responsive chord here. In December, 1941, he had claimed to Kodály that he felt lucky in lacking the inclination to write a new large score since “even if I had a new orchestra work it would be impossible to get it performed.”

Koussevitzky's visit in April, 1943, changed all that, for the conductor commissioned a work and guaranteed a performance. The change in Bartók's spirit was immediate. His wife Ditta wrote to Joseph Szigeti to tell him

of the change in her husband: “One thing is sure: Béla's ‘under no circumstances will I ever write a new work’ attitude has gone. It's more than three years now.”

Bartók spent the summer resting under medical supervision at a sanatorium at Lake Saranac in upstate New York; here he wrote most of the new work in just eight weeks. And in working on the score, he recovered much of his former energy and enthusiasm. He told Szigeti early in 1944 that the improvement in his health allowed him to finish the Concerto for Orchestra – or perhaps it was the other way around.

Béla and Ditta Bartók made the trip to Boston late in November, 1944, to attend the premiere, as the composer reported to a friend a few weeks later:

We went there for the rehearsals and performances – after having obtained the grudgingly granted permission of my doctor for this trip. It was worth wile [sic], the performance was excellent. Koussevitzky is very enthusiastic about the piece, and says it is “the best orchestra piece of the last 25 years” (including the works of his idol Shostakovich!).

For the first performance Bartók wrote a commentary printed in the orchestra's program book, something he did only rarely. His summary of the spirit of the work was no doubt a response to his own feeling of recuperation as he composed it:

The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last one. The title of this symphony-like orchestral work is explained by its tendency to treat the single instruments or instrumental groups in a *concertant* or soloistic manner. The ‘virtuoso’ treatment appears, for instance, in the fugato sections of the development of the

first movement (brass instruments), or in the *perpetuum mobile*-like passage of the principal theme in the last movement (strings), and, especially, in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages.

He paired the first and fifth movements, as well as the second and fourth, so that the overall structure is a symmetrical pattern balanced through the middle (this was a favorite design in his multi-movement works).

The Concerto opens with a mysterious introduction laying forth the essential motivic ideas: a theme built up of intervals of the fourth, answered by symmetrical contrary motion in seconds. These ideas become gradually more energetic until they explode in the vigorous principal theme in the strings, a tune that bears the imprint of Bartók's musical physiognomy all over with its emphatic leaping fourths and its immediate inversion. It is a rich mine of melodic motives for future development. The solo trombone introduces a fanfare-like figure, again built of fourths, that will come to play an important role in the brasses later on. A contrasting theme appears in the form of a gently rocking idea first heard in the oboe. Most of these materials make their first impression as melodies pure and simple, not as the source material for contrapuntal elaboration, but Bartók works out a wondrously rich concoction with all kinds of contrapuntal tricks, and the fact that this was possible is, of course, no accident; the composer planned it from the start in designing his themes.

The “Game of Pairs” that forms the second movement is simple but original in form, a chain-like sequence of folk-oriented melodies presented by five pairs of instruments, each pair playing in parallel motion at a different interval: the bassoons in sixths, then oboes in thirds, clarinets in sevenths, flutes in fifths, and trumpets in seconds. After a brass chorale in the middle of the movement, the entire sequence of tunes is repeated with more elaborate scoring.

The third movement, *Elegia*, is one of those expressive “night music” movements that Bartók delighted in. He described it as built of three themes appearing successively, framed “by a misty texture of rudimentary motifs.” The thematic ideas are closely related to those of the first movement, but they are treated here in a kind of expressive recitative of the type that Bartók called “*parlando rubato*,” a style that he found characteristic of much Hungarian music.

The *Intermezzo interrotto* (“Interrupted Intermezzo”) alternates two very different themes: a rather choppy one first heard in the oboe, then a flowing, lush, romantic one that is Bartók’s gift to the viola section. But after these ideas have been stated in an ABA pattern, there is a sudden interruption in the form of a vulgar, simple-minded tune that descends the scale in stepwise motion. This tune actually comes from the Seventh Symphony of Dmitri Shostakovich, which Bartók heard on a radio broadcast while working on the Concerto for Orchestra. According to his son Péter, he was so incensed with the theme’s ludicrous simplicity that he decided to work it into his new piece and burlesque it with nose-thumbing jibes in the form of cackling trills from the woodwinds, raspberries from the tuba and trombones, and chattering commentary from the strings. Soon, however, all settles back to normal with a finale BA statement of the two main tunes.

The last movement begins with characteristic dance rhythms in an equally characteristic Bartókian *perpetuo moto* that rushes on and on, throwing off various motives that gradually solidify into themes, the most important of which appears in the trumpet and turns into a massive fugue, complicated and richly wrought, but building up naturally to a splendidly sonorous climax.

The overwhelming success of the Concerto for Orchestra marked the real beginning of Bartók’s fame with the broad concert audience. It remains without doubt his best-known and best-loved purely orchestral work, but over the years it has also provided

a key by means of which many listeners have learned to love Bartók’s music, including the pieces that were once found to be too “difficult.” And for Bartók personally, composing this score proved to be just the tonic he needed. It had filled his summer 1943 “rest cure” with, if not rest, at least a cure. In the fall, Bartók and Ditta received a visit from their friend Agatha Fassett, who was astonished at the change in the composer over the summer, and when he showed her the completed score to the Concerto for Orchestra, he said to her (as she recalled later in her book on Bartók’s last years):

But what nobody could possibly see in this score is that through working on this concerto, I have discovered the wonder drug I needed to bring about my own cure. And like so many other discoveries, it just happened accidentally, and was only a by-product of what was of true importance to me, and I was almost unaware, at the time, that it was happening.

The despair that had caused him to give up composing had been overcome – even more so when the Concerto for Orchestra began its triumphal conquest of concert halls the following year. Bartók began accepting new commissions and undertaking further projects, though it was also clear that his health was not permanently improved. As he told a friend in Seattle a few weeks after the first performance of the Concerto for Orchestra: “You said in one of your letters that my recovering was a miracle. This is true only with some reservations: it was only a hemidemisemi-miracle.” Be that as it may, the months remaining to him produced the Sonata for Solo Violin, dedicated to Yehudi Menuhin, and the Third Piano Concerto, finished but for the last seventeen measures, as well as the unfinished Viola Concerto and sketches for a seventh string quartet. For a man who had declared a short time earlier that he never wanted to compose again, that may be miracle enough.

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