

OAKVILLE SYMPHONY PROGRAM NOTES
NOVEMBER 4 & 5, 2023

PROGRAM

Overture **Canadian premiere* – ca. 6 minutes

Jessie Montgomery

Nocturnes – ca. 25 minutes

Claude Debussy

- I. Nuages
- II. Fêtes
- III. Sirènes

Myriad Ensemble, choir

Intermission

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, op. 23 – ca. 35 minutes

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

- I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso – Allegro con spirito
- II. Andantino semplice – Prestissimo – Andantino
- III. Allegro con fuoco

Alexander Panizza, piano

NOTES

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981): *Overture* (2022)



We begin our season with the Canadian premiere of a piece written only last year by one of the finest young American composers. Montgomery, native from New York, infuses her music with the multicultural heritage of her hometown – evident also in this *Overture*. Her works are a vivid representation of the 21st century American sound and her social consciousness. *The Washington Post* described her music as “turbulent, wildly colourful and exploding with life.” She is currently the Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, for whom she wrote this work.

About this work she writes, “*Overture* is a one-movement orchestral tutti steeped in harmonic textures inspired by a fusion between jazz and American classical harmonies, Baroque rhythmic gestures, and polyphonic tension.”

The beginning is striking. The full string section starts in unison (all playing the same sound) an isochrony (playing at the same time) until they begin splitting and the tension becomes more palpable. Even though there are two sections in the music, with a clear return to the first idea in the latter portion, the main idea that is explored is the resonance of the orchestra. The orchestration (the selection of what instruments play) is meticulously designed to explore sonic variants and to open the listener’s pores to a unique moment of attentive listening.

by Lorenzo Guggenheim

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Nocturnes (1892-1899)



I. Nuages II. Fêtes III. Sirènes

When Debussy began writing this pivotal work it had the draft title of *Three Scenes at Twilight*. Despite being labeled as an impressionistic composer, his inspiration was mostly from poetry, –in this case by the ten *Poèmes anciens et romanesques* by the symbolist Henri de Régnier–, and from the *Nocturnes* by the tonalist American painter James McNeill Whistler which are studies in light and shade.

Debussy's lifelong intention was to set music free from traditions, to create a new uninhibited form of art, that would never become academic or obvious. For that he uses several techniques and elements including modern jazz-inspired chords which do not follow the traditional cadence, whole tone and pentatonic scales from Asian inspiration, complex textures and atmospheres, as well as a refined practise of silence and pause in the discourse. The three nocturnes played today have become since their premiere in 1901 a staple of orchestral repertoire and a kick-off of the explorations of the 20th century in music.

Debussy wrote in detail about the programmatic aspects of the piece as follows: “The title *Nocturnes* is to be interpreted here in a general and, more particularly, in a decorative sense. Therefore, it is not meant to designate the usual form of the Nocturne, but rather all the various impressions and the special effects of light that the word suggests. ‘Nuages’ (Clouds) renders the immutable aspect of the sky and the slow, solemn motion of the clouds, fading away in grey tones lightly tinged with white. ‘Fêtes’ (Festivals) gives us the vibrating, dancing rhythm of the atmosphere with sudden flashes of light. There is also the episode of the procession (a dazzling fantastic vision), which passes through the festive scene and becomes merged in it. But the background remains resistantly the same: the festival with its blending of music and luminous dust participating in the cosmic rhythm. ‘Sirènes’ (Sirens) depicts the sea and its countless rhythms and presently, amongst the waves silvered by the moonlight, is heard the mysterious song of the Sirens as they laugh and pass on.” [transl. M. and G. O'Brien]

by Lorenzo Guggenheim

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893): Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op. 23 (1874-1875)



I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso – Allegro con spirito II. Andantino semplice – Prestissimo – Andantino III. Allegro con fuoco

This concert was composed very rapidly, in one month in 1874, but Tchaikovsky tended to be secretive about his new compositions. When this concerto was revealed and then immediately dedicated to piano soloist Nicholas Rubenstein, Rubenstein declared it to be “*ill composed and unplayable.*” Accordingly, Tchaikovsky offered it instead to Hans von Bülow, who premiered the work in Boston in 1875, to enormous acclaim. The “heroic” solo part proved playable – with a vengeance – and the concerto's place as an all-time favourite was assured.

The romantic flavour of the work is quickly evident. After a dramatic opening call by the horns, the strings wrench the music into a new key to take up a sweeping theme. Meanwhile, the piano also grabs attention with a series of powerful rising chords. The orchestral and solo roles are then reversed while the piano develops the theme, after which point it is abandoned and never referred to again. The first movement continues with several brilliant themes and dramatic interplay – even skirmishes – between the soloist and orchestra. A cadenza is embodied in the movement.

The second movement is a combination of slow and *scherzo* material. Its *andantino semplice* presents simple themes with some folk song origins, initially in the flute and then in the other woodwinds, while the *prestissimo* develops into a fast waltz, which is then combined with the first theme in the closing *andantino*. The final *allegro* is nationalistic, and shows much syncopated rhythm, with the energy of a Cossack dance. An *allegro vivo* concludes the work.

by Stephen Walter ©

FROM THE CONDUCTOR'S PODIUM

Welcome to the first subscription concerts of 2023-24! We are proud to present *A SEASON TO SHARE*. We strongly believe that music has the power to evoke profound emotion, open new worlds and help us discover ourselves. And everyone is welcome to experience it.

We start today where you will indulge in hearing live Tchaikovsky's majestic Piano Concerto no. 1 with the magnificent Alexander Panizza. But you will also discover new expressions with the Canadian premiere of Jessie Montgomery's *Overture*. To complete the experience, Debussy's Nocturnes with the presentation of Myriad Ensemble as the choir for *Sirènes*, will be performed in a unique setting designed to immerse us in the magical worlds that Debussy created for us.

And there will be a lot more to come during the season. We will bring you the iconic Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Mozart's Symphony no. 40 in G minor. But you will also discover new voices, reflecting the global sensibility of our times. We are excited to present the Canadian premiere of Symphony in B minor by Leokadiya Kashperova – written in 1904 but just re-discovered – and *Imagination* by Oakville resident Nadya Poklad, which she composed in her native Ukraine in 2021.

We will have thrilling performances from incredibly talented guest artists, including one of Canada's most admired virtuosos, TSO's concertmaster Jonathan Crow, and the return of powerful mezzosoprano Stephanie Yelovich. We also invite you to discover two young rising stars, soprano Julia Surette and Sophie Lanthier on flute, winner of our own Hollier Award in 2014.

I wanted to mark that this year we have added an option called "Pick Three" which allows you to choose three main concerts for a 10% discount and we also brought back discounted tickets for Young Adults (18-35), giving you even more options. However, the best benefits are still reserved for our loyal subscribers who enjoy the largest discounts and pre-sale access.

Our purpose is to share our passion with all of you, and we hope that you will share some precious moments experiencing everything that we have to offer with your friends and family. I'm looking forward to spending time with all of you throughout our season as we together experience the emotion of the Oakville Symphony.