Advance Program Notes

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
Friday, February 21, 2020, 7:30 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
Volodymyr Sirenko, artistic director and chief conductor
Volodymyr Vynnytsky, piano

Sinfonia Concertante in B-flat Major

Piano Concerto no. 2 in G Minor, op. 22

Andante sostenuto
Allegro scherzando
Presto

Volodymyr Vynnytsky, piano

Dmytro Bortniansky
Camille Saint-Saëns

INTERMISSION

Symphony no. 3 in F Major, op. 90

Allegro con brio
Andante
Poco allegretto
Allegro

Johannes Brahms

This performance is supported in part by a gift from Dr. Carl J. Pfeiffer and Mrs. Linda J. Pfeiffer.

Program subject to change

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Program Notes

SINFONIA CONCERTANTE IN B-FLAT MAJOR
Dmytro Stepanovych Bortniansky
Born 1751 in Hlukhiv, Ukraine
Died September 28, 1825, in Saint Petersburg, Russia

Bortniansky was a seven-year-old choirboy in his small hometown in Ukraine when he was chosen to study and sing in the court chapel in Saint Petersburg. His early trajectory resembled another native son of Hlukhiv who was just six years older, Maksym Berezovsky, who also rose from singing in the court choir to starring in the Italian operas that Catherine the Great loved so much. Not long after Berezovsky was sent to Italy to study composition (where he wrote the first symphony by a Ukrainian), Bortniansky followed to pursue his own studies, and he spent much of the 1770s there developing his craft in operas and sacred vocal music.

The striking parallels between Ukraine’s first two international composers diverged upon their returns to Russia: Berezovsky fell out of favor with Catherine and died at 31, whereas Bortniansky became a favorite of the Empress, eventually succeeding one of the visiting Italians to serve as Kappellmeister to her son, Paul, the future Emperor. Bortniansky composed much of his instrumental music during this period to entertain the court, and he also taught keyboard lessons to the royal family.

Little is known about the origins of the Sinfonia Concertante that Bortniansky composed in 1790. That type of concerto for two or more soloists first became popular in Paris, and the manuscript (which was only published for the first time in 1953) has its title page written out in French, specifying solo parts for fortepiano and harp, accompanied by strings and bassoon. The harp part in the original scoring is quite basic compared to the virtuosic keyboard writing, so a reasonable guess is that Bortniansky wrote this so that he and some harp-playing royal could perform together with an orchestra. Constructed in three typical movements, this Sinfonia Concertante sounds like it could have originated in Mozart’s Vienna, especially in this expanded arrangement by the Ukrainian composer Vsevolod Sirenko that redistributes the solo parts into the orchestra.

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2 IN G MINOR, OP. 22
Camille Saint-Saëns
Born October 9, 1835, in Paris, France
Died December 16, 1921, in Algiers, Algeria

Before Camille Saint-Saëns had a widespread reputation as a composer, he was known in Paris and around Europe as a brilliant pianist and, in the view of Franz Liszt, the greatest organist in the world. In the spring of 1868, Saint-Saëns played host to one of the world’s other leading pianists, Anton Rubinstein of Russia, who performed a series of concerts in Paris accompanied by an orchestra that Saint-Saëns conducted. On something of a lark—and in a sign of his great respect for his colleague—Rubinstein declared that he wanted to make his debut as a conductor in Paris, and that Saint-Saëns should write and perform a piano concerto for the occasion. They booked a date just three weeks out at the Salle Pleyel, and Saint-Saëns got to work composing his Piano Concerto no. 2.

In crafting a complete piano concerto on such a tight timeline, Saint-Saëns leaned on the art of improvisation he had mastered as an organist, a tradition that stretched back to Bach and beyond. The extended introduction that begins the andante sostenuto first movement is a pianist’s rendering of an improvised organ prelude, complete with counterpoint in the manner of Bach and the sustained “pedal points” that an organist would play with his feet. After such an imposing introduction, this unusually slow and introspective first movement emphasizes lyrical melodies and balanced exchanges with the orchestra, including the main theme that Saint-Saëns derived from a composition exercise brought to him by his student, Gabriel Fauré.
Any pathos lingering from the first movement gets swept away by the allegro scherzando that follows, with the timpani ushering in a main theme as airy and fleeting as a soufflé fresh from the oven. The presto finale then returns to the original key of G minor with feisty music that resembles a tarantella, that whirlwind Italian folk dance believed to ward off a tarantula’s poison. The first edition of the score provided easier alternatives for the soloist in some of the finale’s most fiendish passages, but we can presume that Saint-Saëns allowed himself no such shortcut, despite finishing this composition mere days before the premiere.

**SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN F MAJOR, OP. 90**  
Johannes Brahms  
Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany  
Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

“I shall never write a symphony,” Brahms lamented in 1870. “You can’t have any idea what it’s like always to hear such a giant marching behind you!” The giant in question was Beethoven, and his legacy haunted Brahms, especially in the genres of symphonies and string quartets. Brahms was 40 by the time he released a quartet, and 43 before his First Symphony reached the public. After that tipping point, orchestral music poured out of Brahms’ pen, with three more symphonies, three concertos, and two overtures coming in the decade that followed.

Brahms composed most of the Third Symphony during his summer vacation in a German spa town in 1883. Within this example of abstract or “pure” music, there are two outside influences that have fascinated musicologists for generations. One is the suggestion that Brahms derived his wide-leaping main theme from alpine yodeling, drawing on his happy memories of other vacations in the Austrian Alps. Even before that theme begins, three initial chords present the other coded reference, embedded in the top notes that rise from F to A-flat to F again, an octave higher.

Brahms left no definitive comment, but the supposition is that these notes stand in for the initial letters of the German phrase “frei aber froh” (free but happy), a riff by Brahms-the-bachelor on the old tagline of his friend Joseph Joachim, the violinist who declared himself “frei aber einsam” (free but lonely). In the home key of F major, the A-flat is out of place, shifting the harmony to F minor instead—perhaps adding a question mark to the claim of “free but happy?” This conflict of major and minor runs throughout the opening movement, as does that three-note motive, which crops up in a variety of contexts and transpositions.

The andante leaves behind the mixed messages of the opening movement, clearing the air with sweet woodwind chorales and warm echoes from the lower strings. Still the “free but happy” motive lingers, as in the last rising answer from the violas before the oboes introduce a new theme.

Rather than a lively scherzo, the symphony’s third movement takes the form of a pensive intermezzo marked poco allegretto. The rising and falling themes, phrased like questions and answers, continue this symphony’s sense of internal debate. The contrasting trio section once again toys with the thin margin that separates the minor and major expressions of a chord.

Defying the usual conventions, this F-major symphony begins its finale in the stark landscape of F-minor. The F – A-flat – F motive returns to settle the matter, with the horns leading the way toward humble woodwind chorales (recalling the second movement) and a drawn-out cadence that traces the “free but happy” intervals one last time.

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National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine

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VOLODYMYR SIRENKO, artistic director and chief conductor

Born in the Poltava region of Ukraine, Volodymyr Sirenko has been compared by the international press to other brilliant conductors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen and Simon Rattle.

Sirenko’s conducting debut took place at the Kyiv Philharmonic Hall in 1983 with works by Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Boulez. In 1989 Sirenko graduated from the Kyiv Conservatoire, where he studied conducting under Allin Vlasenko. In 1990 he was a finalist at the International Conducting Competition in Prague. A year later, he was appointed as chief conductor and artistic director of the Ukrainian Radio Symphony Orchestra, a position which he held until 1999. During this period he made over 300 recordings that are kept in the funds of the Ukrainian Radio and include Mozart’s Symphonies nos. 38 and 41, Beethoven Symphony no. 9, Brahms’ A German Requiem, Rachmaninov’s Bells, and Dvořák’s Symphonies nos. 7 and 9.

Sirenko has been the artistic director and chief conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine since 1999. Highlights among hundreds of programs that he has performed with the orchestra since then include cycles of Gustav Mahler’s complete symphonies, all four Passions and Mass in B Minor by Bach, and Lyatoshynsky’s complete symphonies.

Sirenko recorded over 50 CDs, and the CD of Silvestrov’s Requiem for Larissa was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2005. He premiered many works by Ukrainian composers, including Silvestrov’s Symphonies no. 7 and 8, and Stankovych’s Symphony no. 6.

Sirenko has toured Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. He has worked with many international orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Moscow and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Sinfonia Warsovia, NOSPR (Katowice), the Svetlanov Symphony Orchestra, the Bratislava Radio Symphony, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, the National Philharmonic of Russia, and the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

Sirenko has appeared in numerous concert halls around the world, including Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Brucknerhaus (Linz), Barbican Hall and Cadogan Hall (London), Théâtre des Champs-Elysées and Opéra Comique (Paris), Seoul Art Center, Palau de la Música in Valencia and Centro Manuel de Falla in Granada, Filharmonia Narodowa (Warsaw), the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory and the Great Hall of St. Petersburg Philharmonia, the Roy Thomson Hall (Toronto), the Tokyo City Opera, and the Osaka Symphony Hall.

Sirenko is a People’s Artist of Ukraine and laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize, Ukraine’s most prestigious award. Sirenko is professor of opera and symphonic conducting at the National Music Academy of Ukraine.

VOLODYMYR VYNNYTSKY, piano

Internationally renowned pianist Volodymyr Vynnytsky is laureate of the Margueritte Long-Jacques Thibaud International Piano Competition in Paris. Vynnytsky has performed with leading orchestras and appeared in solo recitals in many prestigious concert halls, including Carnegie Hall; Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall; Merkin Concert Hall; Steinway Hall; the Phillips Gallery in Washington, D.C.; the Great (Bolshoi) Hall at the Moscow Conservatory; the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées; Amphithéâtre Richelieu de la Sorbonne; Salons de Boffrand de la Présidence du Sénat in Paris; St. John’s Smith Square in London; Philharmonic Big Hall of Columns (Kyiv); Odessa Philharmonic Theatre in Ukraine; Tsai Performance Center (Boston); Teatro de Santa Isabel in Recife, Brazil; Linder Auditorium in Johannesburg; and Baxter Theatre Centre Concert Hall in Cape Town, South Africa; among many others.

A popular television and radio guest, Vynnytsky has also been featured on NHK-TV (Japan) and in the United States on WQXR-FM in New York, and nationally on NPR.
Recital and chamber music appearances have included guest invitations in numerous International Festivals in Ukraine (Kyiv Music Fest, Virtuosi, Contrasts, and Bridge of Alexandre III), France (Masters de Pontlevoy, Les MusiCimes, and DSCH), Brazil (Virtuosi), Curacao (Art in Avila), Canada (Niagara International Chamber Music Festival), Czech Republic (American Spring Festival) and the U.S., including Artosphere Arts Festival, Chamber Players International, LWMF, Mohonk Festival of the Arts, Windham Chamber Music Festival, Southampton Festival of the Arts, Lake San Marcos Chamber Music Society, Music Mountain in Connecticut, Piccolo Spoleto in Charleston, Rachmaninoff International Festival in Los Angeles, Music at the Institute in New York, and Art Center of Greene County, where he has served as artistic advisor and resident pianist since 1996.

Described by critics as possessing “incredible technique and deep musical understanding” and “The pianist is simply superb!” (American Record Guide), Volodymyr’s recent performance in Charleston, South Carolina, earned him a glowing review in The Post and Courier, titled “Ukrainian pianist delivers excellence,” in which his playing is hailed as “a grand display of skill and precision that was breathtaking.”

Born in Lviv, Ukraine, Vynnytsky studied at the Lviv Music School for Gifted Children and later at the Moscow Conservatory. After earning his doctorate from the Moscow Conservatory under the direction of Yevgeny Malinin, he taught at the Kyiv Conservatory and concertized extensively throughout Ukraine, the other republics of the former Soviet Union, Europe, the U.S., Canada, Central and South America, and South Africa.

Vynnytsky has been a visiting member of the piano faculty at State University of New York (SUNY) at Purchase, New York, and at the University of Connecticut. In 2003 he was appointed music director of the Music and Art Center of Greene County, New York. He is an honorary professor of Lviv State Academy of Music, Odesa State Music Academy, and Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine (Kyiv Conservatory). In October 2012 and 2015 Vynnytsky served as a chairman of the jury of the Emil Gilels International Piano Competition in Odesa, Ukraine. Vynnytsky is a director of Chamber Music at the College of Charleston in South Carolina.

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF UKRAINE
Volodymyr Sirenko, artistic director and chief conductor
Theodore Kuchar, conductor laureate

Formed by the Council of Ministers of Ukraine in November of 1918, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine (NSOU) is considered to be one of the finest symphony orchestras in Eastern Europe. Its first conductor was Oleksander Horilyj. Natan Rachlin was the artistic director of the orchestra from 1937 until 1962. Stefan Turchak, Volodymyr Kozhuchar, Fedir Hlushchenko, Igor Blazhkov, and Theodore Kuchar consequently conducted the orchestra as its principal conductors. Other conductors who worked with the NSOU include Leopold Stokowski, Igor Markevitch, Kurt Sanderling, Evgeny Mravinsky, Kiril Kondrashin, Evgeny Svetlanov, and Gennady Rozhdestvensky. Soloists who performed with the NSOU include Artur Rubinstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter, Mstislav Rostropovich, Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan, Gidon Kremer, Oleh Krysa, Monserrat Caballé, Jose Carreras, and Juan Diego Flores.

The NSOU was entrusted with the premier performances of the works of composers such as Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, Aram Khatchaturian, Boris Lyatoshynsky, Valentyn Silvestrov, Myroslav Skoryk, and Evgen Stankovych.

The orchestra has gained international recognition over a remarkably short period of time. After an appearance in Moscow, Dmitri Shostakovich commented: “This orchestra has as distinguished a group of performers as one would be likely to find anywhere. The ensemble of the orchestra is of the highest level. In addition, the various soloists and instrumental groups within the orchestra play exceptionally and complement each other beautifully—as would the greatest of the world’s symphony orchestras.”
Since 1993 the NSOU has released more than 100 sound recordings, which include both Ukrainian and international repertoires. Most of these recordings have received the highest international acclaim. In 1994 the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) rated NSOU’s recording of Boris Lyatoshynsky’s Symphonies nos. 2 and 3 as “The Best Recording of the Year.” The CD of Silvestrov’s *Requiem for Larissa* was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2005. The CD of Bloch and Lees’ Violin Concertos was nominated for a Grammy Award four years later.

The NSOU has performed in successful concert tours throughout Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Belarus, China, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, England, Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Arab Emirates.

“... A program rich with energy and unusually adventurous placed the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine in a highly favourable light when it gave its only Sydney concert during its Australian tour on Friday. This is an orchestra with many virtues. Its strings can conjure up a vibrant songfulness; the woodwinds have a fruity, penetrating ripeness; the brass could endanger the walls of Jericho; the percussion might wake the dead...”

—*The Sydney Morning Herald*

Since April 1999 Volodymyr Sirenko has been the artistic director and chief conductor of the NSOU. Since June 2006 Alexander Hornostai has been its managing director and producer.
Engagement Events

Friday, February 21, 2020
Q&A WITH CONDUCTOR OF THE NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF UKRAINE
Before the performance Volodymyr Sirenko, artistic director and chief conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, participated in an informal discussion with audience members about the ensemble and evening’s program, translated by Nataliya Brantly.

Presented in partnership with the Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech

Special thanks to Nataliya Brantly and Pat Hyer

Go Deeper

Which of the pieces on this evening’s program moved you most? Why?
In the Galleries

Now on View

**FIerce women**

Chakaia Booker, Guerrilla Girls, Jenny Holzer, Marilyn Minter, and Rozeal

Thursday, January 30-Saturday, April 25, 2020

All galleries

This suite of one-person exhibitions by some of the most acclaimed artists of our era presents exemplary works of art that are formidable, impactful, and “fierce” in both their dramatic visual power and the potency of ideas presented. Spanning the latter part of the 20th century up to the present time, the exhibition features sculpture, painting, works on paper, digital prints, and video, all of which give voice to a range of critical issues in our world today. Beginning with the historical precedent of the Guerrilla Girls, a notorious (and still active) collective of activist artists, the exhibition continues with works by the internationally acclaimed artist Jenny Holzer, then proceeds up to the present with digital prints and a video by Marilyn Minter. Ranging from Holzer’s iconic LED signs to Chakaia Booker’s audacious rubber tire compositions or Rozeal’s fantastical, cross-cultural mashups, these artists take on gender and racial inequality, the politics of identity, and a panoply of injustices surrounding power, morality, and corruption in our world.

**MsREPRESENTATION EVENT**

Art Herstory Talk Series, Part II: Women in Renaissance and the Early Modern Era

Thursday, February 27, 2020, 6 PM

Michelle Moseley-Christian, Ph.D., associate professor and Art History program chair;
  - co-director, Material Culture & Public Humanities M.A. Program, School of Visual Arts

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery

Free; approximately 30 minutes

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