

Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

Scheherazade

JoAnn Falletta, *Conductor*

Alexandra Dariescu, *Piano*

Saturday, November 5, 2022, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm

Sunday, November 6, 2022, Ruth Eckerd Hall at 7:30 pm

Béla Bartók

(1881-1945)

Clara Wieck Schumann

(1819-1896)

Edited Kile Smith

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

(1844-1908)

The Miraculous Mandarin Suite, Op. 19 🎵

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 7 🎵

I. Allegro maestoso

II. Romanze: Andante non troppo, con grazia

III. Finale: Allegro non troppo

Alexandra Dariescu, *Piano*

Intermission

Scheherazade, Op. 35

1. The Sea and Sinbad's Ship

2. The Tale of Prince Kalendar

3. The Young Prince and the Princess

4. The Festival at Bagdad; The Sea; The Ship Goes
to Pieces on a Rock

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Alexandra Dariescu plays the Steinway Piano from the Music Gallery, exclusive agents for Steinway & Sons.



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Bela Bartók (1881-1945)

Suite from Miraculous Mandarin, Op. 19

Duration: ca. 19 minutes

We seldom think of a piece of classical music as depraved or morally corrupt. But through the middle of the 20th century, many new works were banned as degenerate or dismissed by appalled audiences. If a composer's latest piece wasn't blacklisted or burned, it was shelved for a later, more tolerate time.

Bela Bartók's music for the *Miraculous Mandarin* certainly kept the censors busy. It languished after its first performance in 1926 in Cologne and didn't see a stage in Budapest – the capital of Bartók's homeland – until after his death in 1945. One of Bartók's most lurid and bizarre creations, this ballet/pantomime is grim to the core, but like any good symbolist fable, it transports love over the brutalities of life.

Those brutalities are symbolized through prostitution, deception, theft, lust and murder. The plot involves a girl forced into slavery, a few hapless victims whom she entices, a trio of murderers, and a Chinese nobleman. Bartók set the scene with this description:

"I lead the highly respectable listener from the crowded streets of a metropolis to a ruffian's den." The music is violent and vicious, representing the dark side of not only a city, but its broken and soulless people.

"Three thugs force a beautiful girl to lure men into their den so they can rob them," Bartók writes. "The third visitor is a wealthy Chinese. He is a good catch, and the girl entertains him by dancing (suggested by the clarinet). The Mandarin's desire is aroused, inflamed by passion, but the girl shrinks from him in horror.

"The thugs attack him, rob him, smother him in a quilt, and stab him with a sword, but their violence is of no avail. They cannot kill the Mandarin, who continues to look at the girl with love and longing in his eyes." Only after the girl satisfies the Mandarin's desire does he collapse and die.

Bartók began sketching the music at the end of World War 1, and the savagery of that conflict left an imprint on this often cacophonous music, notes the musicologist József Ujfalussy.

"European art began to be populated by inhuman horrors and apocalyptic monsters," he notes. "These were the creations of a world in which man's imagination had been affected by political crises, wars and the threat to life in all its forms.

"This exposure of latent horror and hidden danger and crime, together with an attempt to portray these evils in all their magnitude, was an expression of protest by 20th-century artists."

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 7

Duration: ca. 23 minutes

Clara Schumann may best be remembered as the wife of the composer Robert Schumann, but she could well have eclipsed him had history given women musicians equal footing. This isn't revisionist; in fact, Clara accepted being cloistered in the male-dominated profession of her time. Nonetheless, she made her mark through her gifts and tenacity.

"I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose," she once said. "There has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?"

Like Felix Mendelssohn's sister, Fanny, Clara was an extraordinary musician and a formidable pianist. Her talents were etched out of hard work: rigorous study in theory, harmony, counterpoint and orchestration with some of Germany's finest teachers. She also developed a sharp business acumen, mastering the details of the concert tour and programs before she was 20. As she matured, the depth and variety of her concerts became the talk of Europe

After Robert died in 1856, Clara devoted the rest of her life to his memory, always dressed in black during concerts, and eschewing showpieces for more serious repertoire. She played everything from memory.

Although she remained active well into her 70s, her best-known work is the *Piano Concerto* from 1837, which she began sketching at age 13 and performed three years later with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Innovative for its time, the

concerto is cast in three short, sweeping movements with advanced harmonies and virtuoso figurations that belie the work of a teenager.

The *allegro maestoso* opens with a flowing orchestral statement followed by the stark main theme on the piano. So far so good. But the movement doesn't develop in the usual way – the second theme appears and disappears, and there is no recapitulation.

An arpeggio takes us to the *romanze* movement, with a delightful duet between piano and cello. A trumpet fanfare introduces the *finale*, which unlike so many 19th century concertos isn't some lively dance to lighten the mood, but music of weight, tension and a bit of tasteful keyboard razzle dazzle.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Scheherazade, Op. 35

Duration: ca. 42 minutes

Some composers excel at crafting tunes, while others are rhythmic innovators. Then there are those with a knack for synchronizing all of an orchestra's moving parts. Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov had this gift, a master orchestrator who gave us works of rich, opulent coloring and Oriental exoticism, notably *Scheherazade*, the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*, and *Capriccio Espagnol*. And let's not forget his most famous nugget, *Flight of the Bumblebee*, which might pop up as an encore at your next piano recital.

Rimsky-Korsakov was a member of The Mighty Five, a group of Russian composers that included Modest Mussorgsky, Cesar Cui, Alexander Borodin and Mily Balakirev. Their aim was a Russian nationalist school, free of the influence of Germany, France and Italy.

Rimsky-Korsakov, however, was frustrated by the inconsistent skills of his friends, and wasn't shy in dabbling in or "correcting" their uneven or incomplete works. His fingerprints all over Mussorgsky's *Night on Bare Mountain* and *Boris Godunov*, and Borodin's *Prince Igor*. Alert listeners can hear his influence in the early compositions of two of his most famous pupils, Sergei Prokofiev and Igor Stravinsky.

Rimsky-Korsakov's most popular work, *Scheherazade*, is a four-part symphonic suite based on Arabian stories from *A Thousand and One Nights*, and connects each section through an irresistible violin melody.

The composer offered his own notes to the story of an evil Sultan who enjoys executing his wives on their wedding night, until his latest bride, Scheherazade, fascinates him with exotic tales and delays her demise.

"The Sultan, convinced of the falseness and inconsistency of all women, had sworn an oath to put to death each of his wives after the first night," the composer writes.

"However, Scheherazade saved her own life by arousing his interest in the tales she told during 1001 nights. Driven by curiosity, the Sultan postponed her execution from day to day, and at last abandoned his design. Scheherazade told miraculous stories to the Sultan. For her tales she borrowed verses from the poets and words from folk-songs, combining fairy tales with adventure."

For his score, Rimsky-Korsakov assigned the poignant violin theme to Scheherazade, and the brass suggests the Sultan. The four movements include:

- I. The Sea and Sinbad's Ship
- II. The Story of the Kalendar Prince
- III. The Young Prince and the Young Princess
- IV. The Festival of Baghdad; the Sea; the Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock.

The composer expected listeners to take these descriptions with a grain of salt, and instead enjoy the exotic 42-minute score not as a story with musical accompaniment, but as music for music's sake.

Program notes by Kurt Loft, a St. Petersburg-based freelance writer and former music critic for The Tampa Tribune.