Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

Pictures at an Exhibition

Michael Francis, *Conductor*
Stefan Jackiw, *Violin*

Saturday, Apr 26, 2025, Mahaffey Theater at 8 pm
Sunday, Apr 27, 2025, Ruth Eckerd Hall at 7:30 pm

Paul Hindemith
(1895-1963)

Mathis der Maler (Symphony) ♩
I. *Engelskonzert* (Angelic Concert)
II. *Die Grablegung* (Entombment)
III. *Versuchung des heiligen Antonius* (Temptation of St. Anthony)

Erich Wolfgang Korngold
(1897-1957)

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.35 ♩
I. Moderato nobile
II. Romance: Andante
III. Finale: Allegro assai vivace
Stefan Jackiw, *violin*

Modest Mussorgsky
(1839-1881)

Pictures at an Exhibition
Promenade
1. Gnomus
Promenade
2. The Old Castle
Promenade
3. Tuileries
4. Bydlo
Promenade
5. Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells
6. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuÿle
7. Limoges
8. Catacombs
Cum mortuis in lingua mortua
9. The Hut on Fowl's Lets
10. The Great Gate of Kiev

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Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)
***Mathis der Maler* (Symphony)**
Duration: ca. 25 minutes

"Degenerate'' was how the Nazis described the music of Paul Hindemith, who should "not be permitted to influence the future course of German music.'' He was too experimental, expressionistic and avant-garde, they said, and cannot be a part of the cultural lexicon of the Third Reich – along with hundreds of other musical creations that failed to conform to nationalist policy.

Had Nazi censorship fully succeeded, much of Hindemith's music may have been reduced to rubble, along with scores of German towns and cities during the Second World War. But the famed conductor Wilhelm Furtwangler, music director of the Berlin Philharmonic, threw Hindemith a lifeline. Furtwangler urged the composer to extract excerpts from his new opera, *Mathis der Maler*, based on the life and series of altar paintings of the 16th-century artist Matthias Grünewald, who was commissioned by the church of St. Anthony in Isenheim, Alsace. Furtwangler wanted to prove that good music was still being written in Germany.

He conducted the first performance of the symphony in 1934 and wrote a newspaper story defending Hindemith against the growing opposition of the party. It backfired, however, and the conductor was eventually removed from the podium. Hitler was particularly incensed by the music, abstract as it was, and Hindemith left his homeland for Switzerland.

By 1940, he was in the United States teaching music at Yale and enjoyed a varied career as theorist, instrumentalist (he played the viola), conductor, composer, musicologist and writer, and is credited for the "new objectivity'' in music that promoted an unsentimental and sober reaction to expressionism.

Today, *Mathis der Maler* ("Matthias the Painter'') is an essential part of the orchestral repertoire. Although the opera is about the Peasant's War of 1524, Hindemith employed as his real subject the place of the artist in times of social upheaval. Its musical structure and traditional use of church melody are more a look to the past than a progressive venture, which makes the Nazi reaction all the more curious. Hindemith melded Bach-like counterpoint, Gregorian chant and folk song into the symphony's three musical depictions:

I. *Engelkonzert* (Concert of the Angels) – The first movement is a prelude that depicts the Nativity scene and makes use of a late-Renaissance folk tune dispatched by the trombones.
II. *Grablegung* (Entombment of Christ) – The second movement describes the burial of Christ through a series of haunting themes and a plaintive oboe melody, which mirrors the use of this woodwind in Bach's *Mass in B Minor.* This section ends in resignation.
III. *Versuchung des heiligen Antonius* (Torments of St. Anthony) – The finale focuses on the saint's torture by horrible creatures, and here Hindemith conjures up an impressive set of grotesque musical ideas before the brass delivers its stirring Alleluia.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)
Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.35
Duration: ca. 24 minutes

Gustav Mahler called him "a genius,'' a prodigy on the order of Mendelssohn. High praise indeed. After all, what 11-year-old boy composes music for a ballet, one celebrated after a performance at the Vienna Court Opera? Then, three years later, his *Sinfonietta* knocks the socks off no less than Richard Strauss, who calls the teenager's musical gifts equal to "any living composer.''

At 23, he writes *The Dead City*, a symbolist opera rich in virtuosic orchestration, and stagings throughout Europe and the United States elevate the young man to a high place in the world of art. In a poll taken in 1932, the Viennese newspaper *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* named him alongside Arnold Schoenberg as the two most highly regarded composers of the day.

All this was heady for Erich Korngold, whom many American classic movie buffs know for his Hollywood film scores. Korngold's first job in California came from an invitation from the theatrical director Max Reinhardt, who asked the young man to arrange Mendelssohn's music for the film *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He accepted and signed a contract as a staff composer for Warner Brothers, where he wrote music for 22 films, mostly swashbucklers, and won two Oscars.

“Even though he came from Europe, he’s effectively an American composer in just how much he absorbed and influenced the American style,’’ said TFO Music Director Michael Francis.

Korngold also wrote a great deal of abstract works, and he aimed high with his *Violin Concerto*, composing it for Jascha Heifetz, arguably the greatest violinist of his day. Its premiere in 1957 by the St. Louis Symphony was an immediate success, resulting in “the most enthusiastic ovation in the history of the auditorium’’ and comparing it to the Mendelssohn concerto, according to one review. The New York critics were less enthusiastic about the lush and romantic work, calling it “ordinary and sentimental,’’ with the *Sun* coining the phrase “more corn than gold.’’

Cast in the same key as the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms and Tchaikovsky, the music is heady and expressive, its aching late-romantism pouring out in every direction. The work’s three movements are essentially a patchwork of lyrical ideas, what some call a “reverse inspiration’’ by borrowing from four of the composer’s film scores.

The opening *Moderato nobile* theme is based on music from the 1937 film *Another Dawn*, starring Errol Flynn, but listeners might notice its influence on the opening theme of the 1960s television series *Star Trek.* The second movement, a *Romance* in G major, quotes from the 1937 film *Anthony Adverse,* and the contrasting middle section serves as the heart of the concerto. The finale, marked *Allegro assai vivace*, begins with a virtuosic jig and uses thematic material from 1937’s *Prince and the Pauper* that leads to a spirited close.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)
***Pictures at an Exhibition* (orchestrated by Maurice Ravel)**
Duration: ca. 35 minutes

The canon of classical music is filled with unfinished and repackaged masterworks. Some are performed as they were at the composer’s death, such as Bach’s *Art of Fugue*, which ends like an incomplete sentence. Others, including Mozart’s *Requiem* and Mahler’s *Tenth Symphony*, were fleshed out based on surviving sketches and educated guesses.

Still others are dressed in a new wardrobe altogether, most notably Mussorgsky’s grandly imaginative *Pictures at an Exhibition*, written in 1874 as an extended piano suite in 10 movements. A half-century later, Maurice Ravel adapted it for full orchestra, seeing its dramatic potential as a concert showpiece, which it has remained to this day.

The music found a new, younger audience in 1971, when the British art rock band Emerson, Lake & Palmer devoted an entire album to an electrified version. But we owe ourselves the treat of hearing the original piano score in all its unvarnished truth.

Based on a series of paintings and sketches by Mussorgsky’s friend Viktor Hartmann, the suite takes listeners on a tour through a museum, with a promenade – in changing keys – serving as the “walking pace’’ between works of art. The mood varies from somber to grotesque to triumphant as the visitor strolls through the exhibition, stopping to reflect on each sketch or watercolor.

The opening promenade leads directly into the ominous *Gnome* and continues with the gothic *Old Castle* and the sound of an alto saxophone. Children play in *Tuileries*, a tuba portrays on oxcart in *Bydlo*, and *Ballet of the Chicks* unfolds as a short orchestral scherzo.

The combined portraits of the rich *Samuel Goldenberg* and the poor *Schmuÿle* are next, and a lively *Marketplace at Limoges* runs uninterrupted into the eerie, chord-heavy *Catacombs*. An interlude, *With the Dead in a Dead Language*, uncovers the promenade theme in chilling suspense before giving way to the percussive and brassy *Hut on Fowl’s Legs*. Then, the grand finale: the *Great Gate of Kiev*, a rousing flourish for full orchestra and tubular bells designed to bring down the house.

Program notes by Kurt Loft, a journalist and arts writer who has covered classical music in Florida for more than 40 years. A member of the Music Critics Association of North America, he lives in St. Petersburg.