

MICHAEL STERN, *Music Director*

GONZALO FARIAS, *Associate Conductor, David T. Beals III Chair*

FIRST VIOLINS

Jun Iwasaki[^], *Concertmaster*
Miller Nichols Chair
Stirling Trent, *Associate Concertmaster*
Chiafei Lin, *Acting Assistant Concertmaster*
Sunho Kim[‡], *Assistant Concertmaster*
Anne-Marie Brown
Michael Brown[^]
Betty Chen
Anthony DeMarco
Susan Goldenberg*
Tomoko Iguchi
Dorris Dai Janssen
Filip Lazovski^Δ
Vladimir Rykov
Alex Shum*

SECOND VIOLINS

Tamamo Someya Gibbs, *Principal*
Kristin Velicer, *Acting Associate Principal*
Minhye Helena Choi, *Acting Assistant Principal*
Nancy Beckmann
Autumn Chodorowski[^]
Mary Garcia Grant
Kazato Inouye
Rena Ishii
Lisa Jackson^Δ
Stephanie Larsen
Sodam Lim[^]
Rachel Sandman^Δ

VIOLAS

MingYu Hsu[^], *Principal*
Jessica Nance, *Acting Associate Principal*
Duke Lee, *Acting Assistant Principal*
Julius Adams^Δ
Kent Brauning
Sean Brumble
Marvin Gruenbaum
Jenifer Houck
Jesse Yukimura

CELLOS

Mark Gibbs, *Principal*
Robert A. Kipp Chair
Susie Yang, *Associate Principal*
Richard Hill Chair
Alexander East, *Assistant Principal*
Maria Crosby
John Eadie
Lawrence Figg
Rung Lee
Meredith McCook
Allen Probus

DOUBLE BASSES

Jeffrey Kail, *Principal*
Evan Halloin, *Associate Principal*
Nils Aardahl[^]
Joseph Nuñez^Δ
Caleb Quillen
Richard Ryan
Nash Tomey[‡]

FLUTES

Michael Gordon, *Principal*
Marylou and John Dodds Turner Chair
Shannon Finney, *Associate Principal*
Kayla Burggraf Michal

PICCOLO

Kayla Burggraf Michal

OBOES

Kristina Fulton, *Principal*
Shirley Bush Helzberg Chair
Alison Chung, *Associate Principal*
Matthew Lengas[^]

ENGLISH HORN

Matthew Lengas[^]

CLARINETS

Raymond Santos, *Principal*
Bill and Peggy Lyons Chair
Silvio Guitian, *Associate Principal*
John Klinghammer

E-FLAT CLARINET

Silvio Guitian

BASS CLARINET

John Klinghammer

BASSOONS

Ann Bilderback, *Principal*
Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Chair
Thomas DeWitt, *Associate Principal*
Maxwell Pipinich

CONTRABASSOON

Thomas DeWitt

HORNS

Alberto Suarez, *Principal*
Landon and Sarah Rowland Chair
David Sullivan, *Associate Principal*
Elizabeth Gray
David Gamble
Stephen Multer,
Associate Principal Emeritus

TRUMPETS

Julian Kaplan, *Principal*
James B. and Annabel Nutter Chair
Steven Franklin, *Associate Principal*
George Goad[^]

TROMBONES

Roger Oyster, *Principal*
Porter Wyatt Henderson,
Associate Principal
Jahleel Smith^Δ
Adam Rainey[‡]

BASS TROMBONE

Jahleel Smith^Δ
Adam Rainey[‡]

TUBA

Joe LeFevre, *Principal*
Frank Byrne Chair

TIMPANI

Timothy Jepson, *Principal*
Michael and Susan Newburger Chair

PERCUSSION

Josh Jones, *Principal*
David Yoon, *Associate Principal*

HARP

Katie Ventura^Δ, *Acting Principal*
Katherine Siochi[‡], *Principal*

LIBRARIANS

Elena Lence Talley, *Principal*
Fabrice Curtis

Justin White,
Director of Orchestra Personnel

Tyler Miller,
Stage Manager

* Non-Rotating Musician
[^] New Member
[‡] On Leave of Absence
^Δ One-Year Member

RAVEL'S RAPSODIE AND SCRIABIN'S POEM OF ECSTASY

Friday and Saturday, March 3-4, 2023 at 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, March 5, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.

HELZBERG HALL, KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

MATTHIAS PINTSCHER, *guest conductor*
GEORGE LI, *piano*

GÖRGY LIGETI

San Francisco Polyphony

MAURICE RAVEL

Concerto in G Major for Piano and Orchestra
I. Allegremente
II. Adagio assai
III. Presto
George Li, *piano*

INTERMISSION

MAURICE RAVEL

Rapsodie espagnole
I. Prélude à la nuit
II. Malagueña
III. Habanera
IV. Feria

ALEXANDER SCRIABIN

The Poem of Ecstasy, op. 54

The 2022/23 season is generously sponsored by
SHIRLEY and BARNETT C. HELZBERG, JR.

The Classical Series is sponsored by the

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Guest artist George Li is sponsored by
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MATTHIAS PINTSCHER, GUEST CONDUCTOR

The 2022/23 season is Matthias Pintscher's final season as music director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the world's foremost contemporary music ensemble, founded in 1980 by Pierre Boulez and winner of the 2022 Polar Prize of the Royal Swedish Academy, the equivalent of the "Nobel Prize" in music. In his most successful decade-long artistic leadership of EIC, Pintscher continued and expanded the cultivation of new work by emerging composers of the 21st century, alongside performances of iconic works by pillars of the avant-garde of the 20th century.

As a conductor, Pintscher enjoys and maintains relationships with several of the world's most distinguished orchestras, among them the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Amsterdam's

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He is also creative partner for the Cincinnati Symphony, where he serves as a conductor, performer and creator with the intent and effect of enlarging the footprint and understanding of what it means to be a symphony orchestra in the 21st century.

As guest conductor in Europe, Pintscher makes debut appearances this season with the Wiener Symphoniker and Gürzenich Orchester of Cologne and returns to the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, Barcelona Symphony and Berlin's Boulez Ensemble. In North America, he will make prominent debuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Kansas City Symphony in addition to regular visits to the Cincinnati Symphony and repeat guest engagements with the Detroit Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic and New World Symphony. Pintscher has also conducted several opera productions for the Berliner Staatsoper, Wiener Staatsoper and Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. He returns to the Berliner Staatsoper in 2023 for Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

Pintscher is well known as a composer, and his works appear frequently on the programs of major symphony orchestras throughout the world. In August 2021, he was the focus of the Suntory Hall Summer Festival in Tokyo. His third violin concerto, *Assonanza*, written for Leila Josefowicz, was premiered in January 2022 with the Cincinnati Symphony. In the 2016/17 season, he was the inaugural composer-in-residence of the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and from 2014 to 2017, he was artist-in-residence at the Danish National Symphony Orchestra.

Pintscher has held several other titled positions, most recently as artist-in-association with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra for nine seasons. In 2020, he was music director at the Ojai Festival, and in 2018/19, he served as the season creative chair for the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and artist-in-residence at the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. He appears virtually every season with the New World Symphony in Miami, a training orchestra for post-conservatory, pre-professional musicians. Pintscher has been on the composition faculty of the Juilliard School since 2014.



Photo by Simon Fowler

GEORGE LI, PIANO

Praised by the Washington Post for combining "staggering technical prowess, a sense of command and depth of expression," pianist George Li possesses brilliant virtuosity and effortless grace far beyond his years. Since winning the Silver Medal at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition and being named recipient of the 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant, Li has rapidly established a major international reputation as he performs regularly with some of the world's leading orchestras and conductors.

Highlights for Li's 2022/23 season include concerto engagements with the Cleveland Orchestra in Miami, the symphonies of Dallas, Detroit, Kansas City, New Jersey, Indianapolis, Portland (Maine), Arkansas, Pacific, Fairfax and Modesto and the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège

in Belgium.

Recent concerto highlights include performances with the Los Angeles, New York, London, Rotterdam, Oslo, St. Petersburg and Buffalo philharmonics; the San Francisco, Tokyo, Frankfurt Radio, Sydney, Montreal, Baltimore, Utah and Pittsburgh symphonies; and the Philharmonia, DSO Berlin and Orchestra National de Lyon. Li has also performed with major Chinese orchestras including the China Philharmonia, Shanghai Symphony and Guangzhou Symphony.

In recital, Li has performed at distinguished venues including Carnegie Hall, Davies Hall in San Francisco, the Mariinsky Theatre, Elbphilharmonie, Munich's Gasteig, the Louvre, Seoul Arts Center, Tokyo's Asahi Hall and Musashino Hall, NCPA Beijing, Shanghai Poly Theater and Amici della Musica Firenze, as well as appearances at major festivals including the Edinburgh, Verbier, Ravinia, Vail, Seattle, La Jolla, Colmar and Montreux festivals.

In 2011, he performed for President Obama at the White House in an evening honoring German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Among Li's many prizes and awards, he was the first prize winner of the 2010 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, the inaugural Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition and the Grand Prix Animato, as well as a recipient of the 2012 Gilmore Young Artist Award and the 2018 Arthur Waser Prize.

Li is an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist. His debut album, "Live at Mariinsky," which was recorded live at the Mariinsky Concert Hall, won an Opus Klassik award for Soloist Recording of the Year in 2018. His second recording for the label, featuring Liszt solo works and Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, was recorded live with Vasily Petrenko and the London Philharmonic and released in October 2019.

Li began his piano studies at age 4 with Dorothy Shi and gave his first public performance at Boston's Steinert Hall at the age of 10. He started working with Wha Kyung Byun at the New England Conservatory at age 12. In 2019, he completed the Harvard/New England Conservatory dual degree program, earning a bachelor's degree in English literature and a master's degree in music. He is currently pursuing an artist diploma at the New England Conservatory. When not playing piano, George is an avid reader and photographer, as well as a sports fanatic.

GYÖRGY LIGETI

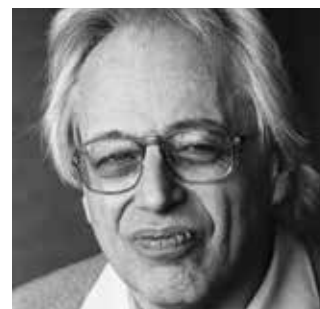
San Francisco Polyphony (1974)

13 minutes

2 Piccolos, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, alto flute, oboe d'amore, English horn, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, bass drum, glockenspiel, tam-tam, vibraphone, whip, xylophone, piano, celeste, harp and strings.

György Ligeti was commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony to write *San Francisco Polyphony* in 1973, to celebrate the orchestra's 60th anniversary. The work is dedicated to Seiji Ozawa, the orchestra's conductor and music director. Ligeti spoke about the work in this way in an interview with Péter Várnai:

This is an orchestral work, neither symphony nor concerto, which is why I simply gave it the title Polyphony. Actually, this could be title of any of my works ... In 1972, I spent six months with my family at Stanford University near San Francisco ... While I was composing the *San Francisco Polyphony*, I believed that the atmosphere of the city determined the work, or at least the atmosphere was there in the work. When I then heard it, I noticed that it was far more Viennese, that there were many expressive melodies reminiscent of Alban Berg or Mahler. Perhaps the prestissimo tempo closing section, with its machine-like freneticism, evokes an American big city. But please don't interpret it as program music. Perhaps there is a feature which is valid as a program. San Francisco is a very foggy city ... There is a cluster at the beginning of the work, which is filled with the most different melodies, but you cannot hear them because they are woven together like vines. Then, one by one, each melodic idea, each clear pattern rises up, but then falls back into the eddy. I could say that this is the general constructive principle of this work. It is also characteristic that the emerging melodies pass from one instrument to another, and change their tone colors."



GYÖRGY LIGETI (1923-2006)

Known for:

- *Musica ricercata* (piano cycle, 1953), later rearranged as *Six Bagatelles for Wind Quintet*
- *Atmosphères* (for orchestra, 1961)
- *Lux Aeterna* (for chorus, 1966)
- *Le Grand Macabre* (opera, 1977)

- György Ligeti (pronounced JURJ LIHG-ih-tee) was born to a Hungarian Jewish family in Transylvania, Romania in 1923. He studied music at the conservatory in Cluj and privately in Budapest. In 1944, during the German occupation of Hungary in World War II, Ligeti (then aged 21) was sent to a forced labor brigade. His brother, aged 16, was deported to the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp and both of his parents and his aunt and uncle were sent to Auschwitz. Only his mother survived. Ligeti managed to escape the labor brigade and made his way back to Cluj on foot; the journey took two weeks.
- After World War II, Ligeti completed his education at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. With Zoltán Kodály, the famous co-founder (with Béla Bartók) of ethnomusicology, as one of his teachers, he researched the Hungarian folk music of Transylvania. At Kodály's invitation, a year after he graduated, he returned to the academy as a teacher.
- In the 1950s, under ever-increasing censorship of art from Hungary's Communist government, Ligeti composed acceptable works for public consumption while writing more daring works "for the bottom drawer." After the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956, he fled the country on a train, hiding under sacks of mail, eventually arriving in Vienna. He was to spend the rest of his life in Austria and Germany.
- The avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen helped Ligeti secure a job writing music for West German Radio in Cologne. His breakthrough came with two orchestral works, *Apparitions* (1959) and *Atmosphères* (1961). These pieces, along with most of his works from the late 1950s and 1960s, eschew traditional melody and harmony for densely packed, slow-moving clusters of chromatic notes. Individual parts move in contrapuntal lines, but the counterpoint is not audible to the listener. This micropolyphony, as Ligeti dubbed it, creates the paradoxical simultaneous sensations of both stasis and motion.
- In 1968, Stanley Kubrick used Ligeti's music, without his knowledge or permission, in his iconic film "2001: A Space Odyssey." *Atmosphères* and two vocal works, *Requiem* and *Lux Aeterna*, were used to express the desolation and isolation of the moon and the mystery of the monolith. When Ligeti discovered this, he sued the film studio and settled out of court for a small payment and ongoing royalties. Kubrick wanted to use more of the composer's music in "The Shining," but this time contacted Ligeti to secure his permission and pay him a significant fee. He also used part of the second movement of Ligeti's *Musica ricercata* as a recurring motif in "Eyes Wide Shut."
- In Ligeti's later years, he was interested in and influenced by a wide range of subjects both musical and non-musical, including sub-Saharan African music, fractal geometry and chaos theory. After a long illness, he died in Vienna in 2006. *AJH*
- The avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen helped Ligeti secure a job

MAURICE RAVEL

Piano Concerto in G Major (1931)

22 minutes

Solo piano, piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, E-flat clarinet, clarinet, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, whip, wood block, harp and strings.

THE STORY

Ravel's only two-hand piano concerto had a long and tortuous (though perhaps not torturous) history. It ended up being his penultimate composition before he died in 1937, but he had considered composing a piano concerto as early as 1906. That idea, a seven-section piece based on a theme from each of the seven Basque provinces, led to some sketches but was quickly scrapped; he returned to the idea in 1913 but again abandoned it. In 1929 he began sketches for the concerto we know today, but put it aside when he received a commission from Paul Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein, an Austrian pianist who lost his right arm in World War I, commissioned Ravel (and many other composers of the day) to write a piano concerto for the left hand alone. Ravel obliged, then returned to the other concerto. He completed it in 1931, telling an interviewer:

My only wish ... was to write a genuine concerto, that is, a brilliant work, clearly highlighting the soloist's virtuosity, without seeking to show profundity. As a model, I took two musicians who, in my opinion, best illustrated this type of composition: Mozart and Saint-Saëns. The music of a concerto should, in my opinion, be lighthearted and brilliant, and not aim at profundity or at dramatic effects.

Ravel had planned on giving the premiere of the work himself, but poor health prevented him. Marguerite Long premiered it instead, with Ravel conducting, first in Paris and then in a European tour of sixteen cities

THE MUSIC

The first movement begins with the orchestra and piano immediately off to the races. The movement contains no fewer than five themes; the first suggests a Basque folk melody, the second is influenced by Spanish music, and the remaining three are derived from jazz. Instead of the typical solo cadenza, Ravel writes three: one for harp, one for woodwinds, and finally one for the piano.

The second movement begins with a long piano soliloquy. The yearning melody has an improvisatory air about it, achieved with some difficulty. Ravel commented, "That flowing phrase! How I worked over it bar by bar! It nearly killed me!" The English horn reprises the melody at the end of the movement.

The third movement is the shortest of the three. It begins with four sharp chords that punctuate the sections of the movement; very fast piano figuration frames what musicologist Michael Fleury describes as "the shrieks of the clarinet and the piccolo, the donkey brays of the trombone and occasional fanfare flourishes in the brass." A few short minutes later, the movement ends with the very same four opening chords marked by a snare drum roll and decisive bass drum thump. **AJH**

MAURICE RAVEL

Rapsodie espagnole (1907)

15 minutes

2 piccolos, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, castanets, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, 2 harps, celeste and strings.

THE STORY

When Ravel composed a Habanera for two pianos in 1895, it's unlikely that he viewed it as a component of a future work. The Afro-Cuban dance form (named after the capital of Cuba) inspired other composers as well, most notably Georges Bizet in *Carmen*, so it is unsurprising that Ravel would explore its properties. Ravel's version premiered in 1898 as part of his *Sites auriculaires*, and then lay fallow until 1907. At that point, Ravel had endured five losses at the Prix de Rome competition and was doubtless eager to be done with academic strictures on his music. He started writing his first opera, *L'heure espagnole*, and one of his first scores composed specifically for orchestra, *Rapsodie espagnole*. With both works, he drew on his mother's Basque-Spanish heritage.

A slow and eminently practical composer, Ravel recycled the earlier Habanera as the third movement of *Rapsodie* and concurrently created a two-piano version of the entire *Rapsodie* with an eye toward sheet music sales. The iridescent orchestral version premiered in Paris at the Théâtre du Châtelet on March 15, 1908, conducted by Édouard Colonne.

THE MUSIC

The four movements of *Rapsodie espagnole* readily conjure the Iberian Peninsula with atmospheric sounds and seductive rhythms. The youthful composer's mastery of orchestration is plain to hear, from subtle aural shadings to effusive symphonic exclamations. The opening Prelude to the Night reconnoiters the landscape, still shimmering from the day's heat, moving languorously over a repeated four-note descending figure: F, E, D, C-sharp. The night gives way to a malagueña, a dance from Andalusia in southern Spain. With its rich array of colors, this movement twirls sensuously before a plaintive English horn solo ushers in a return of the descending figure.

Given its earlier creation, the Habanera movement is the only one in *Rapsodie* that doesn't use the descending figure but there is still a sense of unity given its evocative portrayal of place. Yet again, Ravel's exquisite sound palette is wonderfully beguiling. A vivacious Feria (festival) movement depicts the excitement of the gathering, surrounding a brief melancholy reminiscence with dazzling resplendence. ¡Ole! **ETW**

Program notes by AJ Harbison (AJH) and Eric T. Williams (ETW).

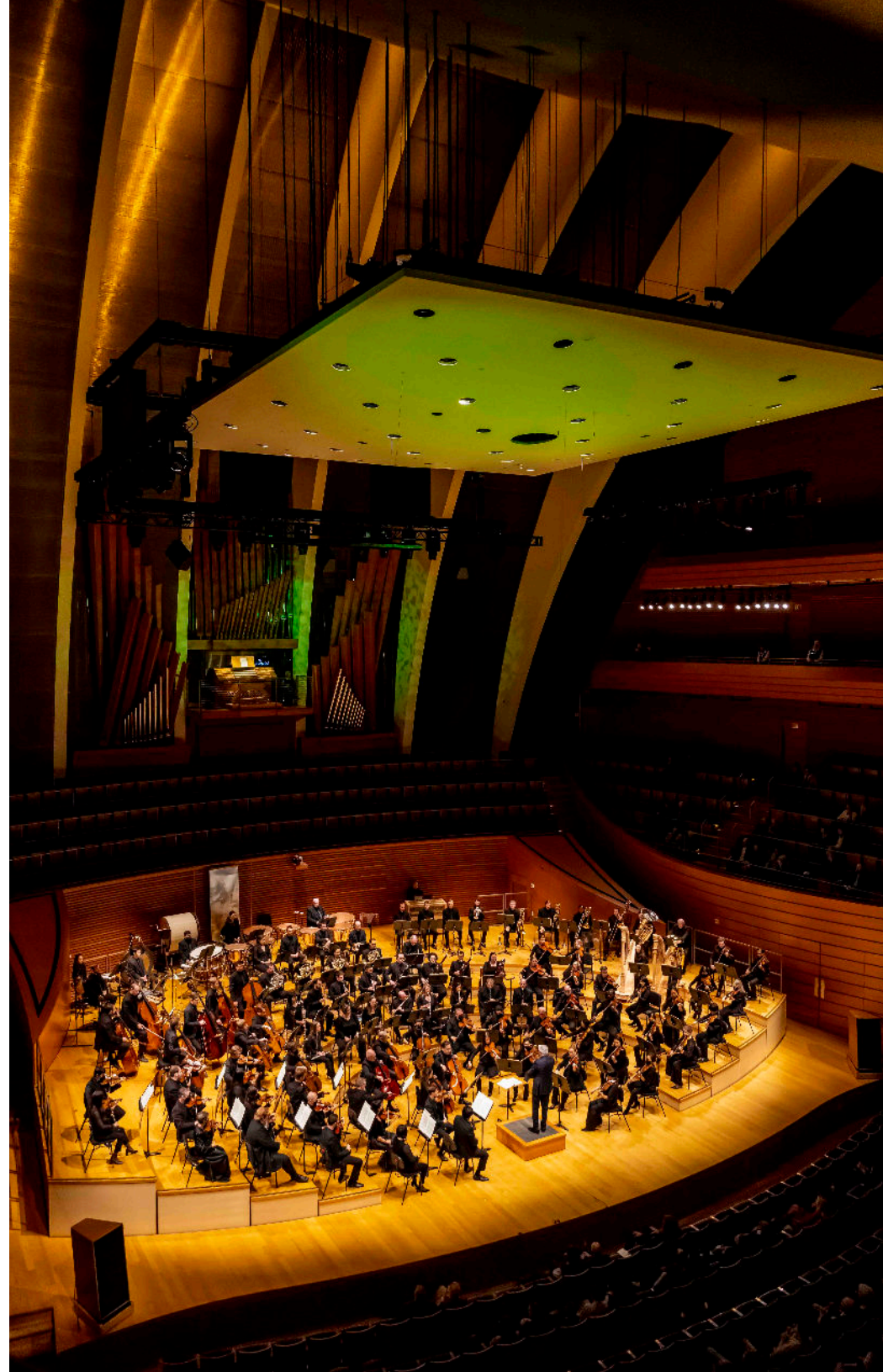


MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Known for:

- *Boléro* (1928)
- *La valse* (1920)
- *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912)
- *String Quartet* (1903)

- Born in the French Pyrenees only a few miles from the Spanish border, Maurice Ravel was greatly influenced by his mother's Basque-Spanish heritage and he often drew upon it in his compositions. He grew up in Paris, beginning piano lessons at age 6. He first attended the Paris Conservatoire as a piano major, later returning to study composition with Gabriel Fauré. He was expelled twice because of his failure to win composition prizes — requisite for graduation — and for unconventional harmonies.
 - Ravel sought the Conservatoire's prestigious Prix de Rome five times, failing to win every time. On his last attempt, he didn't even make it out of the first round. All of the finalists were students of one of the judges and the ensuing negative publicity resulted in the resignation of the Conservatoire's director, Théodore Dubois. The scandal became known as *L'affaire Ravel*.
 - Although rejected for military service during World War I on the basis of age and health, Ravel eventually joined the army as a truck driver, delivering supplies to the front under artillery fire. He dedicated each movement of *Le tombeau de Couperin* (Couperin's Tomb) to a different friend killed in the war.
 - Following the war, Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Ravel to compose a new score for the Ballets Russes in 1919.
- When the work was completed, Ravel and a colleague played a two-piano arrangement of *La valse* for Diaghilev. The impresario rejected the piece, reportedly saying, "Ravel, it's a masterpiece, but it's not a ballet . . . It's the portrait of a ballet, a painting of a ballet." Ravel calmly left the studio but was deeply hurt by the remark. There are varying accounts concerning the degree of enmity between the two but it is certain that they never collaborated again.
- In 1928, Ravel made an extensive concert tour of the United States and Canada to great critical acclaim and considerable financial gain. His now-famous orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* also brought him substantial royalties. Dapper and quite meticulous about his appearance, Ravel was a bon vivant, enjoying the finer things in life his earnings afforded him. He was not particularly fond of his most famous work, commenting, "I've written only one masterpiece — *Boléro*. Unfortunately, there's no music in it."
 - Ravel was in an automobile accident in 1932 and suffered a head injury that led to debilitating symptoms from an indeterminate malady. He was unable to compose and eventually consented to brain surgery. Shortly after the surgery, he slipped into a coma and died at the age of 62. **ETW**



ALEXANDER Scriabin

The Poem of Ecstasy, op. 54 (1908)

20 minutes

Piccolo, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, bells, cymbals, glockenspiel, tam-tam, triangle, celeste, organ, 2 harps and strings.

THE STORY

The Poem of Ecstasy was written when Scriabin was actively involved with the Theosophical Society, developing and pursuing his own unique brand of mysticism. He also happened to be actively involved with a woman who was not his wife, and the originally scheduled premiere in 1906 did not take place because the conductor, a friend of the jilted wife, refused to perform Scriabin's music. It was two more years before the piece was first played, in New York on December 10, 1908. The Russian premiere took place in Moscow in March 1909. For that performance, a program note (most likely Scriabin's own) was printed in the program, which illuminated his ideas about the piece as well as providing a glimpse into some of the core tenets of his beliefs:

The Poem of Ecstasy is the Joy of Liberated Action. The Cosmos, i.e., Spirit, is Eternal Creation without External Motivation, a Divine Play of Worlds. The Creative Spirit, i.e., the Universe at Play, is not conscious of the Absoluteness of its creativeness, having subordinated itself to a Finality and made creativity a means toward an end. The stronger the pulse beat of life and the more rapid the precipitation of rhythms, the more clearly the awareness comes to the Spirit that it is consubstantial with creativity itself. When the Spirit has attained the supreme culmination of its activity and has been torn away from the embraces of teleology and relativity, when it has exhausted completely its substance and its liberated active energy, the Time of Ecstasy shall arrive.

THE MUSIC

Much of *The Poem of Ecstasy* has a feeling of timelessness or suspense, due to its whole-tone scale (an ungrounded scale that sounds like a dream sequence in a movie) and continuous use of dominant chords that never resolve. Three main themes are presented at the beginning of the piece: one a sinuous chromatic theme, another characterized by quick jumps and trills, and one presented by the brass like a fanfare. The structure of the piece is built through the continuous development and combination of these themes, as well as two climaxes, one in the middle of the piece and one at the end. Almost as if in defiance of the ambiguous harmony throughout, the work ends on a glorious C major chord. *AJH*



ALEXANDER Scriabin (1872-1915)

Known for:

- *The Poem of Ecstasy* (1908)
- *Prometheus, The Poem of Fire* (1910)
- 10 piano sonatas (1892-1913)

- The Russian composer Alexander Scriabin was born in Moscow in 1872 (though on the Julian calendar, in use in Russia at the time, he was born on Christmas Day, 1871). His mother died when he was only a year old, and his father, a military attaché, was often away from home. He was raised by his aunt, an amateur pianist, and grew up hearing a great deal of piano music. He was fascinated by the mechanics of the piano and built several pianos himself, which he often gave as gifts to houseguests.
- Scriabin first won fame as a pianist, despite having small hands that could reach just over an octave. He graduated from the Moscow Conservatory with the "Little Gold Medal" in piano performance. He studied composition as well, but did not complete the degree because he clashed, personally and musically, with his composition teacher, and refused to compose in forms that did not interest him.
- His early career was spent as a pianist performing in Russia and abroad; he also signed a publishing contract for his compositions and taught at the Moscow Conservatory. He wrote mostly for the piano, including his first three piano sonatas, which exhibit a late-Romantic style and the influence of Frédéric Chopin.
- Between 1903 and 1909, Scriabin and his family lived in a variety of places, including Switzerland, France, Italy, Belgium and the United States. He began composing more orchestral works, including *The Poem of Ecstasy*. His harmonic language grew more complex, still using chords based in tonal harmony but extending them and using them less in functional ways and more for their own unique colors.
- Scriabin returned permanently to Russia in 1909, working on ever grander, more ambitious compositional projects. He continued performing as a pianist as well, and his last concert, in April 1915, was a triumphant success. Immediately thereafter, an infected boil on his upper lip led to agonizing pain, a high fever, blood poisoning, delirium and finally his death on April 14 (April 27, New Style) at the age of 43. In sympathy for his bereaved and impoverished family, Sergei Rachmaninoff embarked on a tour performing exclusively Scriabin's music, with all profits going to his widow and children.
- Scriabin had a lifelong fascination with philosophy, particularly the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and theosophy. He developed his own brand of mysticism, which influenced many of his compositions. His greatest project was to be called *Mysterium*; it was designed to be performed in the foothills of the Himalayas and involve dancers, mist, light, color and scents as well as music. Its performance would last a full week and would usher in the end of the world and the replacement of the human race with "nobler beings." Scriabin had only completed a prelude to the piece, entitled "Prefatory Action," when he died. *AJH*