

BERKELEY
SYMPHONY



JOANA CARNEIRO
MUSIC DIRECTOR

The Shadows of Time

Thursday, January 26, 2012
Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley

Debussy | Dutilleux | Shostakovich

Berkeley Symphony

The Shadows of Time

Thursday, January 26, 2012 at 8:00 pm Zellerbach Hall

Joana Carneiro conductor

Claude Debussy *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*
(Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun)

Henri Dutilleux *The Shadows of Time*
I. Les Heures II. Ariel Malefique
III. Memorie des Ombres Interlude
IV. Vagues de Lumiere V. Dominante Bleue?
featuring members of the **Pacific Boychoir**

INTERMISSION

Dmitri Shostakovich Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, Op. 47
I. Moderato II. Allegretto
III. Largo IV. Allegro non troppo

The January 26 concert is made possible by the generous support of Concert Sponsors Anita Eblé, Ken Johnson & Nina Grove, William & Robin Knuttel, Deborah O'Grady & John Adams, and Tom & Mary Reicher.

Tonight's concert will be broadcast on KALW 91.7 FM on June 3, 2012.

Please be sure to switch off your cell phones, alarms, and other electronic devices during the concert.

January 26 Program Notes

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun)

Claude Debussy was born in St. Germaine-en-Laye on August 22, 1862. He died in Paris on March 25, 1918. The first performance in the United States was given on April 1, 1902, by the Boston Orchestral Club conducted by Georges Longy, who had been one of the oboists in the second Paris performance under Édouard Colonne. Kent Nagano led the first Berkeley Symphony performance in December 1992. The work is scored for 3 flutes, 2 oboes and English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 harps, crotales, and strings. Duration ca. 10 minutes

Inspired by the evocative poem of his friend, symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, Debussy had begun sketching an orchestral work in 1892 that he soon was calling *Prélude, interludes et paraphrase pour "L'après-midi d'un faune."* A scheduled performance in March 1894 had to be canceled because the composer had not yet finished revising the piece. The much-anticipated work, reduced during the revision process simply to *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, was finally presented at a concert of the Société Nationale in Paris on December 22 and 23, 1894. It was so enthusiastically received

that conductor Gustave Doret had to repeat it on the spot and soon conductors everywhere were clamoring to perform it. Eighteen years later Debussy's sensual music served as the basis for the provocative ballet choreographed and danced by the celebrated Nijinsky.

In Mallarmé's famous poem, first published in 1876, a faun rouses on a drowsy summer afternoon from a dream or daydream and recalls his amorous activities with a pair of nymphs, wondering whether they were real or imagined. In the note that Debussy wrote or at least authorized for the premiere he stated that his music did not "by any means pretend to be a synthesis of the poem; but rather a series of successive scenes across which the dreams and desires of the faun pass in the afternoon heat." The poet, for whom Debussy had played the work on the piano, expressed great admiration, saying, "I didn't expect anything like this. It is music that brings out the feeling of my poem, providing it with a warmer background than color."

There almost had to be a flute solo at the beginning of Debussy's work. Flutes have a long history of association with pastoral scenes, scenes of seduction, and especially with fauns. In the famous Greek myth Pan chases the nymph Syrinx, who is transformed

into rushes, which then become his panpipes. Mallarmé's poem seems to call out for a "long solo":

Le jonc vaste et jumeau dont
sous l'azur on joue:
Qui, détournant à soi le trouble
de la joue,
Rêve, dans un solo long, que
nous amusions
La beauté d'alentour par des
confusions
Fausses entre elle-même et notre
chant crédule;

The vast and twin reed on which
one plays under the azure:
Which, turning to itself [the
reed flute] the trouble of the
cheek,
Dreams in a long solo, that we
were beguiling
The surrounding beauty [of
nature] by false [fictitious]
confusions
Between itself [the beauty] and
our credulous song;

—trans. Robert Greer Cohn

Debussy's inspired, sensual flute roudes have become among the most famous solos in the repertoire and perfectly evoke the languorous, erotic atmosphere of the faun's afternoon. The other main theme, bolder and less dreamy, is played by the winds. The miracle of Debussy's revolutionary technique comes in the treatment of these ideas as fragments to be explored, intertwined, and altered in a manner far removed from traditional formal patterns.

The composer's harmonic palette consists of tonal ambiguities, often related to the interval of a tritone, which had already been outlined in the opening solo. His sonorous colors are drawn from an orchestra rich in winds, joined by four horns and harp but no trumpets or trombones. The only percussion consists of two antique cymbals, delicately chiming the notes E and B.

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Henri Dutilleux (b. 1916)

The Shadows of Time

Henri Dutilleux was born on January 22, 1916, in Angers, France. He composed The Shadows of Time as a memorial tribute to mankind. Commissioned and premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa in 1997, the work is scored for 4 flutes (3rd and 4th = piccolo), 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (triangle, suspended cymbals, crotales, small Chinese gong, tam-tams, tom-toms, snare drum, wood chimes, temple block, whip, glockenspiel, vibraphone, and marimba), celesta, harp, strings; and three children's voices. Duration ca. 21 minutes.

A subtle discipline similarly pervades the music of Henri Dutilleux, who reportedly tosses out a large amount of material in an attempt to mold as perfectly as he can the modest number of works he has

published throughout a lengthy career. He has an affinity for the Flemish artists of the Northern Renaissance, composing with a shared sense of proud craftsmanship. Dutilleux's music often presents a sensuousness of texture—a colorful garden of sounds so delicately cultivated that he often brings to mind a latter-day Ravel. A Proustian preoccupation with the interplay of memory and time passing also recurs in several works.

The Shadows of Time is a somber meditation on loss. The catalyst was the half-century anniversary of the end of World War II in 1995 and of the discovery of Anne Frank's diary, and specifically a memory: the deportation by the Nazis to concentration camps of an entire orphanage of Jewish children. The work unfolds in five "orchestral episodes" with evocative titles. An untitled interlude links the final two episodes. Although only 21 minutes long, the entire piece exudes a concentrated power belying its length, rather like dream time's ability to subvert the clock's rational measurement.

Setting the work in motion ("Hours") is a fatalistic fanfare of brass, punctuated by percussion and strings, tracing a downward fall. These thickly clotted lines of descent recur at several crisis points. A temple block marks the relentless tread of time with banal tenacity. Following an uneasy sustained glissando skid upward in the strings, the note A is urgently repeated high in the trumpets (where the episode began). A brief coda suggests

a false resting stop as trumpets bleat with mutes.

"Evil Ariel" pits flickering divided strings against spiraling constellations in the winds for a scherzo of malignant energy, of which Ariel—a deformation of the serviceable spirit from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or one of Milton's named demons—seems to be a herald. Mood shifts dramatically as the piccolo intones a solo against deceptively childlike timbres from glockenspiel and vibraphone, leading directly into "Memory of Shadows."

Dutilleux calls this central episode the "heart" of the score, on which is written "to Anne Frank and all the children, innocents of the world (1945–1995)." He recounts a stroke of inspiration when he was searching for a "special color in the instrumentation" to contrast with the brass and wind timbres dominating the beginning and heard "some voices coming from a nursery school close to my studio." The score specifies only "three voices of a child"—singing alternately in solo and together. Their vocalise turns to repetition of the simple phrases: "*Pourquoi nous? Pourquoi l'étoile?*" (Why us? Why the star [yellow Star of David]?). The melody suggests a Near Eastern modality mixed with the spirit of Gregorian chant. The touching directness here contrasts with the menacing moods elsewhere in the score.

Eventually the music sinks into the nether regions of the orchestra. The interlude and "Waves of Light" episode move slowly up from the lower

strings into the piquant winds, while the dominance of G-sharp verges on the obsessive. The final episode's indeterminate title ("Dominant Blue?") is borne out by the faltering rhythms with which mirroring instrumental choirs continue to obsess over variant phrases from the children's chanting. The need for consolation is urgent, as signaled by the solo trumpet and trombone's attempts to take lyrical flight. Yet they are false starts, and the unforgiving clockwork of the percussion returns, though in more sublimated form, as the entire orchestra tapers out on a repeated C-sharp.

On one level, *The Shadows of Time* can even read like a symphony in miniature: with a forceful opening, demonic scherzo à la Berlioz, meditative slow movement, and enigmatic finale. At the same time, its alternation of violent, threatening gestures with textures almost withdrawn in their delicacy suggests a fundamental disquiet and sense of doubt that gives an edge to the composer's gentle humanism and poetry.

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Thomas May writes frequently about music and theater.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, Op. 47

Dmitri Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg on September 25, 1906. He died in Moscow, on August 9, 1975. Shostakovich

started work on the symphony in April of 1937 and finished it late that summer (there is some confusion over the specific date). The Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Yevgeny Mravinsky gave the premiere on November 21, 1937. The work is scored for large orchestra, consisting of 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons and contra-bassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, triangle, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, glockenspiel, xylophone, 2 harps (played from a single part), piano, celesta and strings. Duration ca. 44 minutes

As one looks back on the career of Dmitri Shostakovich from a century later, his place in music history might seem assured. In terms of performances, his works, especially his symphonies, enjoy a solid position in the orchestral repertoire. The second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (the standard English-language music reference work) confidently states that Shostakovich is "the greatest symphonist of the mid-20th century." Yet during his lifetime, and during the decade or so following his death, his position was not nearly as unequivocal. His approachability, the factor which has contributed to his popularity today, was attacked by those who thought he sold out to popular taste. On the other hand, he was at times accused by the Soviet culture watchdogs as not popular enough, too interested in abstract music for its own sake, or, to use the dreaded term: "formalism."

Not only his art, but his politics have

come under intense scrutiny. As did any artist working for years under the Stalinist regime in the USSR, he had to walk a tightrope between self-expression and obedience to the state. He has been accused of being a Stalinist collaborator (he did bow to government pressure to affix his signature to several documents that condemned his fellow musicians and other worthy citizens), but his defenders claim that he was always a subversive at heart, and that his music contains hidden messages that mock the Soviet authorities. His Fifth Symphony, premiered in 1937, is at the very crux of the controversy, coming at the moment when he was in the greatest danger of imprisonment, exile, or murder because of his work.

In the preceding decades, his star had been rising. A child prodigy on the piano, during his education he was increasingly recognized as a talented young composer with a gift for biting and sometimes shocking satire. His First Symphony (1925, performed 1926), his graduation piece from the Leningrad Conservatory, combined comedy and tragedy in skillful ways; it was a smash from the very first.

In politics, however, his skills were lacking. For example, in December of 1926 he failed an exam in Marxism/Leninism that was required for admission to graduate study. But his early works showed such promise that he acquired something like ideological immunity. It helped that he was an enthusiastic and popular film composer. Stalin himself was said to be a fan of a catchy tune he wrote for the 1932 film, *Counterplan*.

It was only when Stalin encountered some of Shostakovich's more avant-garde works several years later that his troubles began.

The early 1930s were devoted to the composition of his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Premiered in Leningrad in January 1934, it was an immediate critical and popular hit in spite of (or perhaps because of) its lurid and melodramatic story. The opera was quickly picked up by companies around the world, and over the space of a few weeks in January 1936 no fewer than three different productions could be seen in Moscow. As a result, Shostakovich increasingly found himself in the public eye.

This was a dangerous time to catch the attention of the authorities. The Great Purge of the Soviet Communist Party was just beginning, and Stalin's government was seeking to eliminate counter-revolutionary elements in Soviet society. Over the next few years millions of people would be arrested, imprisoned, tortured, sent to exile in Siberia, or executed. Upwards of a million people lost their lives, either directly through murder or through indirect causes. For a terrifying period, it seemed that anyone could be a target—and targets had a way of disappearing without warning. Citizens of Moscow would awaken to find that entire sections of their apartment buildings had been emptied overnight. Writers and other artists were at particular risk, especially if they questioned the actions of the Party or criticized Stalin.

In January 1936, Stalin and his entourage attended a performance of *Lady Macbeth* at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. Shostakovich was present as well, and waited nervously for the dignitaries' reaction. He was dismayed to see that Stalin and his retinue left early; dismay turned to horror two days later when an unsigned editorial in *Pravda* (the newspaper of the Communist Party) ripped the opera—and its composer—to shreds. Clearly, Stalin had been shocked by the display of raw sex and violence on stage, as well as the complete lack of a moral message for the audience to take away. Shostakovich, the young composer who had showed such promise, had been led astray by his teachers and by other critics. Rather than aspiring to the simple and natural art demanded by the Soviet masses, he had been lured into formalism (the worst sin a Soviet artist could commit). He had fallen into error, and must be shown the way back to orthodoxy. The editorial included this ominous phrase: "This is a game that may end very badly."

Shostakovich's career went into a tailspin. Commissions dried up; there was no question of any further performances of *Lady Macbeth* within the Soviet Union. The premiere of his Fourth Symphony was announced by the Leningrad Philharmonic for that December, but after several rehearsals the performance was cancelled by the Soviet Composers Union (entrusted by the Party with the goal of promoting "Socialist Realism" as the only acceptable musical style). Worse, he now

feared for the safety of not only himself, but his friends and family. Indeed, over the course of the Great Purge several of his friends, acquaintances, and distant family members were imprisoned or simply vanished.

It was in this fraught atmosphere that Shostakovich conceived his Fifth Symphony. "My Creative Response," an article attributed to the composer published just before the work's first Moscow performance describes the symphony as showing a man progressing through suffering to a joyous resolution. Shostakovich is speaking of himself and his attempt to return to the true path of Socialist Realism:

If I have really succeeded in embodying in musical images all that I have thought and felt since the critical articles in *Pravda*, if the demanding listener will detect in my music a turn towards greater clarity and simplicity, I will be satisfied.*

Yet, the sincerity of this repentance has been subject to controversy ever since these words appeared. On the surface, the music does seem to follow a Beethovenian model in tracing a hero's journey through dark times and strife to a triumphant happy ending. Did Shostakovich acquiesce completely to the demands of the Stalinist authorities? Another school of thought sees another story encoded below the surface, a dark satire that

* Translation by Richard Taruskin, "Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth: Interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony."

starts by illustrating the sorrows of the Russian people under the Soviet regime and ends with a parody of rejoicing under duress.

The opening theme of the first movement starts off with what could be a proud or defiant gesture, but it quickly loses impetus and collapses. Three repeated notes, deepening the air of resignation, punctuate the end of the theme. These ideas recur, sometimes transformed, in movements III and IV. A simple descending scale melody throws us a curve by going to E-flat when we expect E-natural. Unpredictable harmonic gestures like this keep us off-balance for much of the rest of the movement. A cocky march leads us into a battle of sorts; no clear resolution is reached, and the movement ends quietly in a mood of uncertainty.

A rollicking parody of a waltz intrudes upon the cheerless mood. Shostakovich had been introduced to the music of Gustav Mahler a few years previously, and the Austrian composer's influence is felt strongly throughout this movement. The Trio section of this goofy Scherzo features solo violin accompanied by harp and plucked cellos. Sustaining the intimate sonority, the tune is picked up by solo flute with bassoons. The mordant style of Prokofiev leaves its stamp on the movement as well.

Noisy brass are banished from the Largo. Shostakovich instead divides the strings into multiple parts, making available a great variety of rich textures. Deeply elegiac in tone, this movement has the character of a lament. Its

echoes of Russian Orthodox liturgical music (definitely out of favor in the Soviet Union) have inspired many to hear it as a Requiem for those killed or disappeared in the Great Purge. It ends enigmatically with the magical sonority of harp and celesta embedded in shimmering strings.

Another violent shift of mood kicks off the fourth movement, as if to rouse us from our reverie. Martial music recalls the march-like section in the first movement. After a respite during a relatively quiet section, the snare drum alerts us to the return of the march. After a long buildup the opening theme of the symphony returns, now heard in the major for the first time in a grand apotheosis. But Shostakovich sneaks in a note from the minor scale, which takes some of the sheen off the triumph. And the relentless pounding away on the tonic chord that fills the final pages strikes some as a caricature of a victorious ending.

But before reading narratives or morals into Shostakovich's instrumental music, it's worth remembering his comments after the premiere of his First Piano Concerto in 1933:

I consider it absolutely superfluous to follow the example of a number of composers, who . . . try to decode the content of their compositions with extraneous definitions drawn from some related field of art. I cannot describe the content of my concerto with any means other than those with which the concerto is written.

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