

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Friday, February 14, 2020 at 7:30pm

Saturday, February 15, 2020 at 8:00pm

Sunday, February 16, 2020 at 3:00pm

Rachmaninoff & Scheherazade

Elim Chan, conductor

Stephen Hough, piano

Elizabeth Ogonek

as though birds (Canadian Première)

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

I. Moderato

II. Adagio sostenuto

III. Allegro scherzando

Intermission

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Scheherazade, Op. 35

I. The Sea and Sinbad's Ship: Largo e maestoso – Allegro non troppo

II. The Tale of Prince Kalendar: Lento – Allegro molto

III. The Young Prince and the Princess: Andantino quasi allegretto

IV. The Festival at Baghdad – The Sea – The Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock: Allegro molto
(Jonathan Crow, violin)

As a courtesy to musicians, guest artists, and fellow concertgoers, please put your phone away and on silent during the performance.

ABOUT THE WORKS

Elizabeth Ogonek

as though birds

(Canadian Première)

Born: Anoka, Minnesota, USA, May 26, 1989

Composed: 2013

3
min

“I liked the idea of something large contained in a really small space...it’s a wonderful metaphor for writing a three-and-a-half-minute piece for an orchestra,” so describes Elizabeth Ogonek, of her composition *as though birds*. Like many of her other works, *as though birds*—a London Symphony Orchestra commission—takes its inspiration from words. According to the LSO Live recording notes, Ogonek’s chance encounter in a bookstore with the French anarchist and art critic Félix Fénéon’s *Novels in Three Lines* served as the initial creative stimulus. However, finding nothing in Fénéon’s work “that spoke on a musical level,” she turned to one of her frequent collaborators, the poet and playwright Jonathan Dubow. One stanza from Dubow’s poem *Fugal*, which consists of several three-line stanzas arranged in a matrix, offered the imagery she desired while also capturing the artful concision of Fénéon’s miniature plots:

*as though birds, startled
by a moulting sound
quietly dispersed*

Ogonek’s music is frequently described as “dramatic,” “vivid,” “shimmering,” and “energetic”—adjectives that aptly apply to *as though birds*, whose brief span is densely packed with an immense range of orchestral timbres. The work is structured as three, minute-long musical “variations,” one for each line from Dubow’s stanza. The first is characterized by large dynamic

swells juxtaposed with “bird-like” effects emitted by various instruments in brisk succession—woodwind chirps, wood block drills evoking jackhammering woodpeckers, trills, glissandos, and pizzicato in the strings. After the first variation culminates in a loud climax, the second variation begins, very quietly, with harp and violas, followed, soon after, by a rapid ascent to a piccolo holding a high trill. An agitated section follows: various groups of instruments engage in dialogue, emerging, by turns, to the forefront of the thickening orchestral texture—first, violins, then woodwinds, then violins again, then percussion (toms and piano), and so on. Snatches of genuine melody occasionally materialize amongst violent interruptions and interjections.

The mounting tension comes to a head on an ominous dissonance, sustained by the brass, lower strings, and woodwinds, before it dissipates into the ethereal chimes of the glockenspiel at the start of the third variation. This is “night music” in the vein of Béla Bartók—episodes of shimmering, gossamer textures alternate with darker, mysterious rumblings in the piano and melancholy melodies, the first intoned by French horn, the second by trombone. The work closes delicately, with final peals from the glockenspiel, after which buzzing violins and violas hover for a moment, then disperse into the ether.

Program note by Hannah Chan-Hartley

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18

Born: Oneg, Russia, Apr 1, 1873

Died: Beverly Hills, California, USA, Mar 28, 1943

Composed: 1901

32
min

In 1897, the disastrous premiere of Rachmaninoff's First Symphony threw his promising career as a composer into disarray. For three agonizing years, he found himself unable to create anything significant. He sought the help of Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a psychoanalyst. As the composer recalled, "My relations had told Dr. Dahl that he must at all costs cure me of my apathetic condition and achieve such results that I would again begin to compose. Dahl asked what manner of composition they desired and had received the answer, 'a concerto for pianoforte,' for this I had promised to the people in London and had given it up in despair. Consequently I heard the same hypnotic formula repeated day after day while I lay half asleep in my armchair in Dr. Dahl's study, 'You will begin to write your concerto.... You will work with great facility.... The concerto will be of excellent quality...' It was always the same, without interruption.

"Although it may sound incredible, this cure really helped me. Already at the start of the summer, I was composing once more. The material accumulated, and new musical ideas began to stir within me—many more than I needed for my concerto. By autumn I had completed two movements (the *Andante* and the *Finale*).... These I played that same season at a charity concert, with gratifying success.... By the spring I had finished the first movement (*Moderato*)...and felt that Dr. Dahl's treatment had strengthened my nervous system to a miraculous degree. Out of gratitude I dedicated my Second Concerto to him."

The reasons for its enormous popularity are clear. It displays its emotions directly, particularly warmth and melancholy. The themes are attractive and memorable; Rachmaninoff clothed them in lush orchestral colours; and the solo part is brilliant, mirroring the power and expressiveness of the composer's own magnificent performing skills. He played it himself no fewer than 143 times, and recorded it twice.

Program note by Don Anderson

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Scheherazade, Op. 35

Born: Tikhvin, Russia, Mar 18, 1844

Died: Lyubensk, Russia, Jun 21, 1908

Composed: 1888

41
min

Early on, Rimsky-Korsakov seemed destined to follow other members of his family into a naval career. He was 27 when he decided to make music his life's work. His early training proved haphazard: having somehow been offered the post of professor of composition and orchestration at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he kept ahead of his students only by quickly digesting the same textbooks he was teaching them. Diligent study and major natural talent eventually made a genuine pedagogue out of him. Above all he was a master of colourful orchestration, a skill through which he expressed his taste for exotic subjects.

One of the world's best-known collections of folklore, the *Arabian Nights* or *One Thousand and One Nights*—a vast assortment of magical fables of Persian, Egyptian, and Indian origins—had become known in the west in 1704, translated into French and published by Antoine Galland. They proved an immensely potent source of inspiration, not only in literature but in music, clothing, and décor.

ABOUT THE WORKS

The idea of composing a work inspired by them came to Rimsky-Korsakov during the early months of 1888, while he was putting into shape the materials for Borodin's *Prince Igor*. After producing an outline and a few sketches, he set it aside until the summer. His orchestral mastery meant that three weeks was all the time he needed to complete it.

About *Scheherazade*, in his autobiography, he says: "I had in view the creation of an orchestral suite in four movements, closely knit by the unity of its themes and motives, yet presenting, as it were, a kaleidoscope of fairy tale images." He was, however, reluctant to imply "too definite a program" in the piece. "Originally I had even intended to label the movements Prelude, Ballade, Adagio, and Finale, but on the advice of Anatoly Liadov and others I did not do so," he writes. "I meant the hinted titles of the movements to direct *but slightly* the hearer's fancy on the path which my own fancy had travelled, and to leave more minute and particular conceptions to the will and mood of each."

Ambivalent as Rimsky-Korsakov claimed to be in regard to the suite's degree of

programmatic inspiration, he nevertheless attached the following introduction to the score to remind listeners of the "framing" story of the *Arabian Nights* collection: "The Sultan Shakriar, convinced of the falsehood and inconstancy of all women, had sworn an oath to put to death each of his wives after the first night. However the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by arousing his interest in the tales which she told during the 1,001 nights. Driven by curiosity, the Sultan postponed her execution from day to day, and at last abandoned his bloodthirsty design."

The suite opens with a stern brass theme that could represent the sultan. Answering it is the work's most important recurring motif, a bewitching melody sung by the solo violin: the voice of Scheherazade. Early on, Rimsky-Korsakov also begins to dot the score with featured passages for solo instruments that make the entire suite a marvellous orchestral showpiece. The kaleidoscopic second movement has the character of a scherzo, and the third offers a luscious romantic reverie. The finale is a boisterous carnival, crowned by a colossal climax. The "Scheherazade" theme returns one last time. Keening softly in the heights, it rocks the theme of the Sultan, its bullying tone now soothed, in a tender lullaby.

Program note by Don Anderson

RACHMANINOFF'S SYMPHONIC DANCES

June 4 & 6

American conducting sensation Karina Canellakis leads the TSO in Rachmaninoff's last composition, and celebrated German pianist Lars Vogt plays Grieg's explosive Piano Concerto.



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THE ARTISTS



Elim Chan **conductor**

These performances mark Elim Chan's TSO début.

One of the most sought-after of young conductors, and already widely admired for her unique combination of “drama and tenderness, power, and delicacy” (*Hereford Times*), Elim Chan became the first female winner of the Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition and has now been appointed chief conductor of the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra from this season. In addition, she has held the position of principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra since 2018/19.

The 2019/20 season features many highlights, starting off with an appearance at the BBC Proms, where Elim Chan conducted the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, followed by her débuts with the Ensemble Intercontemporain, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Gürzenich-Orchester Köln, Gothenburg Symphony, and Netherlands Philharmonic orchestras, Swedish Radio and Toronto Symphony Orchestras, and the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. She returned to the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra for their season opening concerts at Amsterdam Concertgebouw and Dortmund Konzerthaus, as well as to the Philharmonia Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, and the Australian Youth Orchestra, amongst many others.

Celebrated by the press for her débuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin in 2019, other highlights last season included engagements with Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, and Sydney Symphony Orchestra, alongside returns to Los Angeles Philharmonic and Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestras.

Elim Chan became assistant conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra in 2015/16 and was appointed to the Dudamel Fellowship program with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 2016/17. Previously she led the Orchestre de la Francophonie as part of the NAC Summer Music Institute in 2012 where she worked with Pinchas Zukerman, and participated in the Musical Olympus Festival in St. Petersburg, as well as in workshops with the Cabrillo Festival and Baltimore Symphony Orchestras (with Marin Alsop, Gerard Schwarz, and Gustav Meier). She also took part in masterclasses with Bernard Haitink in Lucerne in spring 2015.

Elim Chan holds degrees from Smith College and the University of Michigan. Whilst there, she served as music director of the University of Michigan Campus Symphony Orchestra and the Michigan Pops Orchestra. She also received the Bruno Walter Conducting Scholarship in 2013.

elimchan.com

THE ARTISTS



Stephen Hough piano

Stephen Hough made his TSO debut in November 1985.

Combining a distinguished career as a pianist with those of composer and writer, Stephen Hough is regarded as a Renaissance man of his time. The first classical pianist to be awarded a MacArthur Fellowship and a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), his mastery of the instrument as well as an individual and inquisitive mind has earned him a longstanding international following.

Since taking first prize at the 1983 Naumburg Competition in New York, Mr. Hough has performed with the world's major orchestras and at the most prestigious concert halls. His recent North American engagements include performances with the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, and the San Francisco, Montreal, St. Louis, and Detroit symphonies, among many others; recitals in New York at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center; and festival appearances at Aspen, the Hollywood Bowl, Mostly Mozart, and Tanglewood. Internationally, he appears with orchestras and in recital in major music centres such as London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Beijing, Singapore, Shanghai, Sydney, and Melbourne.

Highlights of Stephen Hough's 2019/20 season include re-engagements with the National, Dallas, Oregon, Nashville, and North Carolina symphonies and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic; tours to Australia, China, Korea, Vietnam, and with London's Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; and a multi-concert series at London's Wigmore Hall.

Mr. Hough's extensive discography of over 60 CDs has garnered international awards including the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, several GRAMMY® nominations, and eight *Gramophone* Awards. As a composer, Mr. Hough has been commissioned by Wigmore Hall, Musée du Louvre, London's National Gallery, Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, and the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet, among others. His music is published by Josef Weinberger Ltd.

A noted writer, Mr. Hough has written articles for major publications including the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* (UK), *The Telegraph*, and London's *Evening Standard*. A major anthology of essays by Mr. Hough—titled *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More*—will be published by Faber & Faber (UK) in 2019 and by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (US) in 2020. This follows his first novel, *The Final Retreat*, published by Sylph Editions in March 2018.

Stephen Hough is an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society, a Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, holds the International Chair of Piano Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, and is on the faculty of The Juilliard School in New York.