Toronto Symphony Orchestra
Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Saturday, October 13, 2018 at 7:30pm
Sunday, October 14, 2018 at 3:00pm

Aziz Shokhakimov, conductor
George Li, piano

Ludwig van Beethoven
Overture to Fidelio, Op. 72

Sergei Rachmaninoff
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

Intermission

José Evangelista
Symphonie minute
Envol
Mélopée
Combat
Presto chromatique

Antonín Dvořák
Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95 “From the New World”
I. Adagio – Allegro molto
II. Largo
III. Molto vivace
IV. Allegro con fuoco
In 1803, Beethoven eagerly accepted a commission to compose an opera for the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, for he had long wanted to try his hand at this genre. At the time, post-Revolutionary French opera comique (in which musical numbers are interspersed with spoken dialogue) was all the rage in Vienna, and Beethoven found an acceptable subject in the libretto of a recent French “rescue opera” called Leonore, or Conjugal Love, set in 18th-century Spain and based on a true story. Leonore disguises herself as a young man named Fidelio and works to free her husband, Florestan, from unjust imprisonment. Beethoven saw in her story a vehicle for some of his own philosophical, social, and political views (the idea of freedom, or liberation, is ideologically at the heart of the story). However, forging an opera from that libretto proved to be a tortuous, frustrating process. Shortly before his death, Beethoven said that no other work had given him so much trouble.

Begun around the turn of 1804, Leonore (as he then called it) was his principal, often sole, occupation for more than two years. The première took place in November 1805 under adverse conditions, for Napoleon’s army now occupied Vienna. After just three poorly attended performances, the work was withdrawn. The following spring, two performances of a heavily revised (some said mutilated) version pleased only “a select public,” and Beethoven, after quarrelling with the theatre management, withdrew Leonore again. In the spring of 1814, he radically reworked Fidelio (as he now called it) and found public success at last, though by then he was too fed up to feel much satisfaction. “This whole opera business,” he wrote at the time, “is the most tiresome affair in the world.” For this, his only opera, Beethoven wrote four overtures, altogether. Three were for Leonore—for the 1805 and 1806 productions, and in 1807, for a projected production in Prague. All were inspired by the climax of the last act and were abandoned, presumably because they offered too complete a précis of the dramatic arc of the opera—they gave away the ending. Beethoven showed sound dramaturgical sense when, in 1814, he abandoned the premises of the earlier overtures and wrote this completely new, simpler, and more concise version. This one does not overwhelm the first number, a perky rustic duet in which the jailer’s daughter, while ironing, fends off the romantic importuning of the doorkeeper of the prison. Unlike the Leonore overtures, which all ended in a blaze of C Major, like the opera’s finale, the Fidelio overture is now in E Major, leading naturally into the opening A Major duet, and looking ahead to Leonore’s great E Major aria.

### ABOUT THE WORKS

**Ludwig Van Beethoven**

**Overture to Fidelio, Op. 72**

- **Baptized:** Bonn, now in Germany, December 17, 1770
- **Died:** Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827
- **Composed:** 1814

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6 min

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In 1803, Beethoven eagerly accepted a commission to compose an opera for the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, for he had long wanted to try his hand at this genre. At the time, post-Revolutionary French opera comique (in which musical numbers are interspersed with spoken dialogue) was all the rage in Vienna, and Beethoven found an acceptable subject in the libretto of a recent French “rescue opera” called Leonore, or Conjugal Love, set in 18th-century Spain and based on a true story. Leonore disguises herself as a young man named Fidelio and works to free her husband, Florestan, from unjust imprisonment. Beethoven saw in her story a vehicle for some of his own philosophical, social, and political views (the idea of freedom, or liberation, is ideologically at the heart of the story). However, forging an opera from that libretto proved to be a tortuous, frustrating process. Shortly before his death, Beethoven said that no other work had given him so much trouble.

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Rachmaninoff conceived the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*—his last piece for piano and orchestra—in the spring of 1934, and composed it, in less than two months, that summer in Switzerland, at his villa on Lake Lucerne. For the première in Baltimore, on November 7, 1934, he was joined by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, with whom he recorded the work for RCA Victor a few weeks later, on Christmas Eve. He took his theme from the last of the 24 Caprices for solo violin by Nicolò Paganini. Composed around 1805 and published in 1820, the Caprices are short, étude-like pieces that confront various technical and interpretive problems, and were used as exercises by generations of violinists (and even pianists, beginning, famously, with Liszt). The popular 24th Caprice, in A Minor, inspired many musicians besides Rachmaninoff: Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, and, more recently, Witold Lutoslawski and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Paganini’s theme was ripe for variation—simple, clear, and concise; malleable enough to accept new melodies, harmonies, textures, and rhythmic profiles; and built of rhythmic and melodic motifs (like the prominent turn figure) that invite development. Rachmaninoff’s title signals his free and imaginative treatment of the theme, but this is not really a “rhapsodic” work in the sense of something formless or improvisatory: the sequence of variations is tightly organized, forged into a continuous and potent drama, in a tradition of piano-orchestra works in variation form that begins with some of Mozart’s concerto finales and includes Liszt’s *Totentanz* and Franck’s *Symphonic Variations*.

In 1939, the Russian choreographer Mikhail Fokin produced the *Rhapsody* as a ballet, for which Rachmaninoff himself drafted a biographical scenario, suggesting that Rachmaninoff was inspired not only by Paganini’s theme but by Paganini himself. Paganini was a Mephistophelean figure whose violin playing seduced and inflamed audiences. It is perhaps no coincidence that the *Rhapsody* has the character of a “demonic scherzo,” with a piano part that often

“Komm, Hoffnung” (“Come, Hope”) near the end of Act I.

The *Fidelio* overture is an exciting, festive specimen of Beethoven’s middle-period symphonic style—fanfare-like opening bars with a little motif that he later develops with conspicuous tenacity, and orchestration that is muscular, and even a little militaristic. Like the Fifth Symphony, it owes a debt to public genres of music in Revolutionary France. One still hears allusions to *Fidelio*’s plot structure in this overture—the power of political authority, dungeon gloom, romantic intrigue, hope, heroism, and exaltation. But here they are mere hints of things to come; this overture, properly introduces, rather than tells, the story, managing not to render the rise of the curtain superfluous.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana
alludes to the violin (Variation 19 is marked quasi pizzicato, and Variation 24 mimics double-stops and figuration that crosses strings).

The music is unmistakably Rachmaninoff’s: not the plush, surging Romanticism of earlier works like the Second and Third Piano Concertos but, like other of his late works, lean, astringent, and rhythmically pointed; concise, refined, exquisitely crafted, frequently ironic, and almost studied in its avoidance of sentimentality.

Economy is the key: every aspect of the music is perfectly calculated and controlled; nothing sounds strained or contrived or padded; there are no longueurs. The piano writing is difficult, to be sure, but not so obstinately dense as it is in, say, the Third Concerto, and reserving the really knuckle-busting virtuosity for the climaxes. Rachmaninoff makes every orchestral detail count, reaping dramatic effects from one pluck of the harp, a single phrase on the glockenspiel, a simple trumpet fanfare, a brief wail from the English horn, or a few poignant descants by the concertmaster.

There are 24 variations in all—as there are 24 Caprices—and they fall into three distinct groupings, in the fast-slow-fast pattern of a typical Classical or Romantic concerto. These three “movements” are clearly articulated by pauses and shifts of mood. A stark introduction of just nine bars leads directly into the first movement, comprising the “Tema” and Variations 1 through 10, all in A Minor. Variation 1, labelled “Precedente”, for orchestra alone, actually precedes the theme, and lays down the bassline, which is the theme’s harmonic foundation. This first cluster is mostly fast and intensely energetic, save Variation 6, which is rhapsodic, and Variation 7, in which Rachmaninoff introduces into the piano part, as counterpoint to the Paganini theme, one of his calling cards—the melody of the Gregorian chant, the “Dies irae” (“Day of wrath”).

Variations 11 through 18 comprise a slow middle movement, with the fast, blustery Variations 13 and 14 as parenthetical contrast. The music passes through four new keys, varying widely in character: a cadenza (Variation 11); a minuet (Variation 12); a scherzando (Variation 15); a gracious dance (Variation 16); a mysterious, brooding creation almost devoid of melody (Variation 17); and, finally, Variation 18, with its famous, passionately lyrical theme. It is the emotional centrepiece of the Rhapsody, although Rachmaninoff, with self-deprecating wit, quipped that “I composed this one for my manager.”

A brief transition (just six bars, two of them silent) leads into the final movement, which comprises six increasingly exciting and virtuosic variations that reach a climax in an ominous blast of the “Dies irae” in the brass. But the last word is ironic: at the peak of excitement, Rachmaninoff crib a quiet two-bar cadence from the introduction to create one of the wittiest throw-away endings ever written.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana
José Evangelista

Symphonie minute

Born: Valencia, Spain, August 5, 1943
Composed: 1994

The Société de musique contemporaine du Québec (SMCQ) organizes a biennial event, the Homage Series, designed to “create an artistic convergence surrounding a remarkable composer, underscoring their contribution and lauding them as a ‘national treasure.’” From the fall of 2017 to the fall of 2018, more than 40 concerts and 250 activities will have taken place throughout Canada honouring composer José Evangelista.

In All Ears/All Play, the multimedia guide to this SMCQ Homage Series, Evangelista himself says the following about Symphonie minute:

“This four-movement miniature symphony takes its title from a French expression that implies brevity and that may be used in music, as in the famous Chopin Valse minute. The character of the music is nervous and lighthearted. This is in contrast with the general trend in the symphonic repertoire where works of large proportions predominate, be it in duration, instrumentation or strong expressivity. My symphony consists of four contrasting movements. The first, Envol, is built on a very rapid theme that may suggest a flying bird. Mélopée (recited chant) presents a melismatic melody of improvisatory character, which grows in range and intensity. Combat, is highly rhythmic music, interrupted by moments of repose. And finally, there is the Presto chromatique, which consists of rapidly rising and descending lines. This piece, written in 1994, is dedicated to my children.”

Like Chopin’s so-called Minute Waltz, the word here also means miniature, rather than 60 seconds. That being said, the piece is remarkably compact, given that it follows

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Spanish-born, Montreal-based José Evangelista is a composer and music educator known for his commitment to contemporary classical and non-Western music. Since 1972, he has taught on the music faculty of the Université de Montréal. Among his many notable pupils are composers Analia Llugdar and Ana Sokolovic.

Evangelista began his professional training as something of a polymath: at the University of Valencia, he studied computer science for seven years, earning a degree in 1967; at the same time, he pursued music courses at the Valencia Conservatory, earning a premier prix in music composition there in the same year, followed by studies in pure science in Madrid. Armed with diplomas in composition, physics, and computer science, he immigrated to Canada in 1969, where, “little by little,” musical studies came to the fore, in particular an interest in the music and culture of Southeast Asia and its relationship to Western compositional practice. He made a first visit to Java and Bali in 1976 in the company of fellow composer, John Rea, followed by visits in 1980, 1982, and 2001 to study the Javanese gamelan. He was a founding member of Traditions musicales du monde, a concert society dedicated to promoting non-Western music, which he helped found.
ABOUT THE WORKS

In 1891, Jeanette Thurber, the philanthropist wife of a New York grocery millionaire, was seeking a front-rank European composer to be the new director of the National Conservatory of Music of America, which she had founded in 1885. She set her sights on Dvořák, whose fame had already spread to America, and the composer, though cautious at first, was tempted by her generous terms, and eventually excited at the prospect. He signed a contract at the end of the year, and duly arrived in New York on September 27, 1892.

One of Dvořák’s duties as the director of the National Conservatory of Music of America (1892–95) was to instill a passion for musical nationalism in his students, to which end he began exploring America’s indigenous music. Dvořák put his ideas into practice in an explicitly American work: his Ninth Symphony, to which he gave the title “From the New World”. He began sketching themes as early as December 1892, completed the whole symphony on May 24, 1893, and attended the public première on December 16. Highly publicized, the première was the most sensational success of Dvořák’s career; each movement was applauded, and he had to rise to acknowledge especially tumultuous cheers after the Largo. Soon the symphony was being performed elsewhere in the United States and all over Europe.

The emotional centrepiece of the “New World” Symphony is certainly the Largo, which, despite its fame, still sounds fresh and original. Its pastoral and elegiac tone and almost heartbreaking poignancy evoke unforgottably America’s vast, desolate prairies, in which Dvořák found not only beauty but also sadness, even despair.

Throughout the Largo, Dvořák’s orchestration offers one extraordinary texture and sonority after another—right up to the very last chord, which is scored, to astonishing effect, for divided double basses alone.

The four movements of the “New World” Symphony are tied together by cyclical recurrences of themes. The two main themes of the first movement—the upward-thrusting

Antonín Dvořák

**Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95 “From the New World”**

*Program note by David S. Perlman*
theme (horns) that begins the Allegro molto and the later, spiritual-like melody (solo flute)—are recalled in the movements that follow. In the second movement, both themes are placed in counterpoint with the Largo’s own theme in a striking fortissimo climax; in the third movement, the themes from the first movement appear in the transition between sections and, most notably, in the coda. In the stormy finale, which develops its own severe new theme (horns and trumpets), melodies from all three previous movements are recalled at the end of the development section and saturate the coda, to the point that the finale becomes a kind of synthesis or grand summation of the whole symphony.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana

THE ARTISTS

Aziz Shokhakimov
Conductor

These performances mark Aziz Shokhakimov’s TSO début. Aziz Shokhakimov is currently Kapellmeister of Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Chief Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Uzbekistan, Principal Guest Conductor of La Verdi Orchestra in Milan, and Artistic Director of Tekfen Philharmonic Orchestra.

This remarkable young conductor burst on the scene at the age of just 21 by astounding audiences in Bamberg, where he was awarded second prize at the Gustav Mahler International Conducting Competition under the auspices of the Bamberger Symphoniker. He has since accepted invitations to conduct at distinguished international venues.

Following that competition, he made triumphant débuts: in Germany with Staatskapelle Dresden, Düsseldorfer Symphoniker, Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, SWR Sinfonieorchester, HR-Sinfonieorchester, Dresdner Philharmoniker, and Deutsches Sinfonieorchester Berlin; in Austria with Tonkünstlerorchester Niederösterreich and Tiroler Sinfonieorchester; in Italy with Filarmonica del Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Orchestra Filarmonica della Fenice, and RAI Torino; in Poland with the highly acclaimed Sinfonia Varsovia; elsewhere in Europe, with Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra; in the USA with Oregon, Pacific, and Houston Symphony Orchestras; and in Japan with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra.

Recognition came very early for Shokhakimov. Born in 1988 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, he entered Uspensky Music School for Gifted Children at the age of 6, studying violin, viola, and orchestral conducting (class of professor Vladimir Neymer). At 13, he made his début with the National Symphony Orchestra of Uzbekistan, conducting Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and Liszt’s First Piano Concerto. During the following year, he conducted his first opera, Carmen, at the National Opera of Uzbekistan. He was appointed Assistant Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Uzbekistan in 2001 and became its Principal Conductor in 2006.

Along with his symphonic career, Aziz Shokhakimov is also active in the field of opera. In 2013/14, he directed Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin at the Teatro comunale di Bologna. At Deutsche Oper am Rhein, he conducted a revival of Carmen, after which he was engaged as Kapellmeister, starting in 2015/16. Aida, Hoffmanns Erzählungen, Rigoletto, Der fliegende Holländer, and a highly
acclaimed new production of *Madame Butterfly* have followed since. In 2018/19, he will conduct *Pique Dame* and *Swan Lake*.

Having been selected from more than 100 candidates for the finals weekend with the Camerata Salzburg, Shokhakimov went on to win the prestigious Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award in August 2016. He returned to the Salzburg Festival in August 2017 for the prizewinner’s concert with RSO Wien, enthusing critics and the audience alike.

2018/19 will see Shokhakimov returning to RAI Torino, Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and Düsseldorfer Symphoniker. Débuts include MDR Sinfonieorchester, Orchestre National de Lyon, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

**George Li**

*piano*

*These performances mark George Li’s TSO début.*

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. He captured the Silver Medal at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition and was the recipient of the 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Recent and upcoming concerto highlights include performances with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, Hamburg Philharmonic with Manfred Honeck, a tour of Asia with the London Symphony Orchestra and Gianandrea Noseda, St. Petersburg Philharmonic with Yuri Temirkanov, Philharmonia Orchestra with Long Yu, Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Lyon, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Malmö Symphony, Verbier Festival Orchestra, DSO Berlin, Seattle Symphony, Utah Symphony, Sydney Symphony, and Frankfurt Radio Symphony. He frequently appears with Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra, including performances at the Paris Philharmonie, Luxembourg Philharmonie, New York’s Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Grafenegg Festival, and in various places throughout Russia.

Recital highlights include Carnegie Hall, Davies Hall in San Francisco, the Mariinsky Theatre, Munich’s Gasteig, the Louvre, Seoul Arts Center, Tokyo’s Asahi Hall and Musashino Hall, NCPA Beijing, Ravinia Festival, Koerner Hall, Festival Lanaudière, Edinburgh Festival, and Montreux Festival.

An active chamber musician, Li has performed chamber music with James Ehnes, Noah Bendix-Balgley, Benjamin Beilman, Kian Soltani, Pablo Ferrandez, and Daniel Lozakovich.

Li gave his first public performance at Boston’s Steinert Hall at the age of 10, and in 2011 performed for President Obama at the White House in an evening honouring Chancellor Angela Merkel. Among Li’s many prizes, he was the First Prize winner of the 2010 Young Concert Artists International Auditions and a recipient of the 2012 Gilmore Young Artist Award. Li is currently in the Harvard University/New England Conservatory joint program, studying with Wha Kyung Byun.

George Li is an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist. His début album, which was recorded live from the Mariinsky Concert Hall in St. Petersburg, was released in October 2017.