

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Wednesday, May 15, 2019 at 8:00pm

Thursday, May 16, 2019 at 8:00pm

Sir Andrew Davis, conductor

Louis Lortie, piano

Chan Ka Nin

***My Most Beautiful, Wonderful, Terrific, Amazing, Fantastic,
Magnificent Homeland: Sesquie for Canada's 150th***

(TSO Co-commission)

César Franck

Symphonic Variations for Piano and Orchestra

(In one movement)

Intermission

Gustav Mahler

Symphony No. 7 in E Minor

I. Langsam – Allegro

II. Nachtmusik I

III. Scherzo

IV. Nachtmusik II

V. Rondo – Finale

The appearances of Sir Andrew Davis this season are made possible by Hans and Susan Brenninkmeyer.

Louis Lortie's performances are generously supported by the Whitmer Trudel Foundation.

The performances of Mahler Symphony No. 7 are generously supported by Joanne Baird and the Scarfe Family in memory of Jeremy Scarfe.

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

ABOUT THE WORKS

Chan Ka Nin

My Most Beautiful, Wonderful, Terrific, Amazing, Fantastic, Magnificent Homeland: Sesquie for Canada's 150th (TSO Co-commission)

2
min

Born: Hong Kong, China, December 3, 1949
Composed: 2016

The Toronto Symphony Orchestra's Canada Mosaic sesquicentennial project entailed reaching out to orchestras across Canada to co-commission 40 short, fanfare-inspired works from Canadian composers. These works were performed throughout 2017 both by the partner orchestra and by the TSO. The TSO's performances of these "Sesquies", as they were called, are available for listening at TSO.CA/CanadaMosaic.

This "short piece with a long title," as the composer put it, was co-commissioned with Toronto-based chamber orchestra Sinfonia Toronto, who premièred the work on May 5, 2017; the TSO's own first performance followed three weeks later on May 26. In his note at the time, the composer says that it reflects his enthusiasm for his homeland: "grateful for what Canada has to offer—education, health care, jobs, and a generally peaceful and safe environment. This work tries to capture the essence of being able to live in this most beautiful, wonderful, terrific, amazing, fantastic, and magnificent country."

Emigrating, with his family, to Vancouver in 1965, Chan studied composition with Jean Coulthard at the University of British Columbia, while simultaneously pursuing a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. Jean Coulthard, Chan says, "more than any one person changed my life. One thing she did was to draw attention to my Chinese culture. 'Use your original Chinese name,' she told me, 'and look into yourself as a source.' She taught me to write music from the heart." After graduation from UBC, Chan continued studying composition with Bernhard Heiden at Indiana University. Since 1982, he has taught theory and composition at the University of Toronto.

In 2001, Chan's opera *Iron Road*, with librettist Mark Brownell, won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Musical. That opera is set in the context of the building of the Canadian transcontinental railway, and the role of Chinese labourers in that task. This two-minute Sesquie pulses with some of the same "trans-Canadian" energy of that earlier work.

Program note by David Perlman

César Franck

Symphonic Variations for Piano and Orchestra

15
min

Born: Liège, Belgium, December 10, 1822

Died: Paris, France, November 8, 1890

Composed: 1885

César Franck wrote prolifically for the piano in the early 1840s, during his (brief) career as a virtuoso, but with a few exceptions (like the Piano Quintet of 1879) rarely returned to the instrument—until the summer of 1884, when he composed a dark symphonic poem with an obbligato piano part, *Les Djinns*, based on an Oriental fable by Victor Hugo. It is not the most spectacular virtuoso vehicle. It did, however, serve to reignite Franck's interest in the piano. A great solo work, the *Prélude, choral et fugue*, followed later the same year, then, in the fall of 1885, the *Variations symphoniques* (*Symphonic Variations*) for piano and orchestra, composed, in just two months, for the French pianist Louis Diémer, who had given the Parisian première of *Les Djinns*. "You played splendidly," Franck told him. "I will write you a special little piece and dedicate it to you." He did, and Diémer duly gave the première, in Paris, on May 1, 1886, with the composer himself conducting.

The *Variations symphoniques* is shorter than, say, the average Mozart concerto, but length is the only respect in which it can be considered "little." It is an ambitious, clever, vibrant work. Moreover, in France there had never been much of a concerto repertory, so Franck did not feel compelled to produce something that looked like a traditional concerto. Consequently, the work offers a wholly unique (though characteristically Franckian) synthesis of forms and genres in a single variegated movement. The title is apt: variation is the operative principle throughout—a seamless development of themes, such that the music evolves with the organic continuity of a symphony.

The work is based on not one but *two* main themes, both ripe for extension and transformation. The first theme comprises two contrasting motifs set in conflict in the opening bars. Its first motif, for the strings in stark octaves, is fast, loud, in a dotted rhythm, and violently martial in character; its second motif, for the piano, is slow, soft, plaintively drooping, rhythmically flexible, and fully harmonized. The second main theme appears a few moments later: a gentle waltz for woodwinds and *pizzicato* strings, with only some quiet arpeggios in the piano part.

An equally apt title for this work might well have been *Introduction, Variations, and Finale*, for one can view it as comprising three large sections, with the middle section resembling a textbook set of variations. In the first section the two main themes are introduced and discussed at length by both piano and orchestra. The middle section is then a sequence of six variations on the second main theme, each with its own distinctive profile, texture, and colours, mounting in intensity. With variation six, the mood shifts from drama to reverie, and for the first time, the key changes, from F-sharp minor to F-sharp major, as the piano supplies an accompaniment of lush figuration while the cellos sing out the second theme, and then the first.

A high trill from the piano then signals the beginning of a long, rhythmically vital finale (*Allegro non troppo*), still in F-sharp major, now mostly (though not entirely) taken up with the *first* main theme, and constructed as a sort of Classical sonata form in miniature. Both motifs of the first theme are recast in the form of a

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happy march, and the work ends in dazzling high spirits.

As music for the piano, the *Variations symphoniques* is brilliant and difficult, though the piano does not dominate the proceedings to the degree that it does in the concertos of Chopin and Liszt. Franck places the piano in the middle of, rather than *against*, the orchestra; in some passages the piano serves only to embellish a basically orchestral conception. The piano writing is wonderfully varied, though, especially given the brevity

of the piece. There are textures of glittering figuration in the manner of Chopin or Saint-Saëns, but also heavier “orchestral” textures recalling Brahms and Liszt, as well as some passages of truly Lisztian bravura, like the cascades of big chords and octaves at the end of the finale. (Franck himself had big hands, and apparently wrote with them in mind.) It’s a veritable encyclopedia of 19th-century pianism, which Franck managed somehow to squeeze into just 15 minutes of music.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Gustav Mahler

Symphony No. 7 in E Minor

84
min

Born: Kalischt, Austria, July 7, 1860

Died: Vienna, Austria, May 18, 1911

Composed: 1904–1905

Of Mahler’s nine completed symphonies, the Seventh, which premièred in Prague on September 19, 1908, has been less frequently performed and researched than the others. Recently, though, interest in it—both scholarly and in performance—has undergone a renaissance, inviting conjecture as to how and why this work has divided opinion to the extent it has.

One take on why the Seventh stands alone among Mahler’s orchestral works is its postmodern character. In it, he appears to be surveying, all at once, the history and possible future of the symphony and his own place in this trajectory. He employs the basic structures of the symphony developed since the 18th century—sonata form, scherzo and trio, rondo finale—but he expands, as well as blurs, their formal outlines through constant variation and

transformation of thematic material. He inserts allusions to popular music (e.g., the waltz), albeit in an ironic or parodistic manner, and makes open references to works significant to him (e.g., his own Sixth Symphony and Wagner’s opera *Die Meistersinger*). Orchestral colour, volume, and treatment of instrumental forces are taken to the utmost extremes. Unifying these disparate elements is the duality of “night” and “day”, represented both by Mahler’s use of bitonality (often major and minor keys simultaneously) and the psychological journey from the darker opening movement in E minor to the brilliant C major finale.

The first movement opens with a solemn funeral march (*Langsam*) that introduces three musical ideas: first, a sombre, dark melody (“the voice of nature,” according to Mahler) intoned by the tenor horn; then a

little processional march for woodwinds; and finally a grim trombone figure derived from the tenor horn theme. Momentum eventually builds, leading into the powerful march-like first theme of the *Allegro*. By contrast, the second theme, played by the violins, is all sentimentality and passion. The march theme returns and is developed, taking on increasingly distorted forms. Suddenly, mysterious trumpet fanfares and tremolos high in the violins transport the ear to an otherworldly plane; a chorale-like passage provides calming reassurance before leading into a serene interpretation of the lyrical second theme. But this tranquil interlude does not last, and the mood of the opening march returns. The rest of the movement recapitulates the musical ideas of the introduction and *Allegro* with increasing intensification of mood and energy, ultimately culminating in a dazzling finish.

The central three movements of the symphony are among Mahler's most fantastic inspirations. He had initially titled the first "Nachtmusik" movement as "Nachtstück", meaning a musical piece *about* the night, rather than a piece to be performed during the night. Although he changed the title, "Nachtstück" seems the more appropriate term to describe the shadowy atmosphere of the second movement, the music of which alternates between sections consisting of horn calls and bird song, and a prowling, sauntering march theme. Appearances of the "motto" (major-to-minor chord) from his Sixth Symphony add a tinge of melancholy, while mysterious "sounds of the night" abound throughout, created by offstage cowbells, the tam-tam, and strings plucked or played with the wood of the bow.

The ensuing *Scherzo* conjures up phantoms at a ghostly ball—jerky rhythms on timpani and lower strings give way to whirling figures on muted strings, and then a sarcastic waltz tune. The Trio opens with an oboe theme over trilled "drones", which give it a mock-pastoral effect. It has its own middle section—another

off-kilter waltz theme based on the tenor horn theme that opened the symphony. When the *Scherzo* returns, its musical ideas undergo increasingly parodic variations, eventually disintegrating to nothingness.

The second "Nachtmusik" movement is much more evidently just that: evoking the romantic and enchanting aspects of night through a serenade, which, Mahler told his wife Alma, had been inspired by murmuring streams and the German Romantic poetry of Josef von Eichendorff. Bubbling clarinet motifs pervade throughout. Tender themes in the strings alternate with a phrase based on a short-short-long motif first played by the horn, accompanied in turns by combinations of guitar, harp, and mandolin; the soaring gesture that opens the movement recurs like a refrain. At times, the music becomes anxious, but this is soon dispelled by an affectionate melody for solo cello and horn and a passionate episode for the violins.

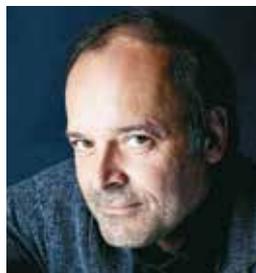
From these three "night" movements, the listener is suddenly thrust into the "daylight" of the finale. It is an intensely bright movement, almost garishly so. After a brief introduction of battering timpani, and woodwind and horn fanfares, a unit of ideas is introduced that recurs throughout the movement, always varied, and accruing new material along the way. The most prominent of these ideas is the majestic processional theme played by the horns—an open allusion to the main theme of Wagner's overture to *Die Meistersinger*, a work Mahler greatly admired and had conducted frequently. It acts like a signpost, each time signalling a new "round" of variation and development. Before the end, Mahler introduces the solemn march theme (in a minor key) from the first movement; it tussles with one of the finale's main themes (in a major key) until, finally, the march theme is transfigured into the major, and the orchestra celebrates with one of the most grandiose of symphonic endings.

Program note by Hannah Chan-Hartley

THE ARTISTS

Sir Andrew Davis conductor

Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director, served as TSO Music Director from 1975 to 1988, when he was named TSO Conductor Laureate. For a detailed biographical note, please see page 26.



Louis Lortie piano

Louis Lortie made his TSO début in January 1978.

For over three decades, French-Canadian pianist Louis Lortie has performed world-wide, building a reputation as one of the world's great pianists. He extends his interpretative voice across a broad spectrum of repertoire rather than choosing to specialize in one particular style, and his performance and award-winning recordings attest to his remarkable musical range.

Mr. Lortie is in demand internationally. As Artist in Residence of the Shanghai Symphony, he performed four different programs with them throughout the 2017/18 season. Other recent highlights include performances with the symphony orchestras of São Paulo, Perth, Adelaide, BBC, Dallas, Taipei, Philadelphia, Budapest, Detroit, Ottawa, and Toronto, and many recitals, including two at Wigmore Hall in London and one presented by the Chicago Symphony.

Upcoming concerts include returns to the New York Philharmonic, and to the orchestras of Atlanta, Milwaukee, Dallas, BBC, Hamburg NDR, São Paulo, Vancouver, Sydney, Adelaide, and New Zealand. His complete Liszt *Années de pèlerinage* will be heard at Cal Performances, Berkeley; and to celebrate Beethoven's 250th birthday year in 2020, he performs complete Beethoven sonata cycles and all of the Beethoven concertos in North America and in Europe.

He has made over 45 recordings for the Chandos label including a set of the complete Beethoven sonatas, the complete Liszt *Années de pèlerinage* (which was named one of the ten best recordings of 2012 by *The New Yorker*), and all of Chopin's solo works. His recording of the Lutosławski Piano Concerto with Edward Gardner and the BBC Symphony received high praise, as did a recent Chopin recording which was named one of the best recordings of the year by *The New York Times*. His recording of the Vaughan-Williams Piano Concerto with Peter Oundjian and the Toronto Symphony won a 2018 Juno Award. Recently released albums are Chopin Waltzes; Saint-Saens' *Africa*, *Wedding Cake*, and *Carnival of the Animals* with Neeme Jarvi and the Bergen Philharmonic; and with Helene Mercier, Rachmaninov's complete works for two pianos and the Vaughan Williams Concerto for Two Pianos. For the Onyx label, he has recorded two acclaimed albums with violinist Augustin Dumay.

Louis Lortie is the Master in Residence at The Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel of Brussels. His long-awaited LacMus International Festival on Lake Como, Italy, began in 2017. He studied in Montreal with Yvonne Hubert (a pupil of the legendary Alfred Cortot), in Vienna with Beethoven specialist Dieter Weber, and subsequently with Schnabel disciple Leon Fleisher. In 1984, Mr. Lortie won First Prize in the Busoni Competition and was also prize-winner at the Leeds Competition.