

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Wednesday, November 13, 2019 at 8:00pm

Davis Conducts Russian Masters

Sir Andrew Davis, conductor

Karen Gomyo, violin

Emilie LeBel

unsheltered

(World Première/TSO Commission)

Sergei Prokofiev

Concerto No. 1 in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 19

I. Andantino

II. Scherzo: Vivacissimo

III. Moderato

Intermission

Dmitri Shostakovich

Symphony No. 10 in E Minor, Op. 93

I. Moderato

II. Allegro

III. Allegretto

IV. Andante – Allegro

The appearances of Sir Andrew Davis this season are generously supported by Hans and Susan Brenninkmeyer.

Karen Gomyo's appearance is generously supported by the Alan and Gwendoline Pyatt Foundation.

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

ABOUT THE WORKS

Emilie LeBel

unsheltered

(World Première/TSO Commission)

Born: Montreal, Quebec, Mar 8, 1979

Composed: 2019

10
min

Canadian composer Emilie Cecilia LeBel specializes in concert music composition, the creation of mixed works that employ digital technologies, and intermedia concert works. Described as having a “deft compositional hand, unwilling to hurry ideas,” and “impressively subtle and sensuous,” her work inhabits sonic worlds that are primarily concerned with textural landscapes, resonance, and variances in colour.

Here are the composer’s thoughts about *unsheltered*:

“...In this humming and doubled land, hold worry, only me

and I get older or I grow farther from myself and I always most love the moment before now...”

—Book of Worry by Joanna Doxey

Much of my recent artistic work has been a contemplation of the surrounding landscapes that I inhabit, reflecting on these sites, smells, shapes, and sounds that are constantly in flux. Often finding refuge in small moments of calm outside the city, my music tends to embody these fleeting moments, juxtaposing them against the daily experiences of my city-dwelling life.

I began working on this project during spring 2019, when a large portion of Alberta directly to the north of Edmonton was on fire. Counterpoint to this crisis locally, was a constant barrage of news information

surrounding both the migrant crisis and the climate crisis. The notion of shelter felt very much in focus while I sat down to compose every day—my surroundings near and far feeling tenuous, slippery, and humming with an uneasy energy, suggesting something inevitable. This work considers the necessity for refuge, with music shaped by lines that grasp upwards interspersed with slippery glissando; leading to moments where everything tumbles downwards; and finally contrasted by moments of lightness and retreat.

Emilie LeBel completed her doctorate in composition at the University of Toronto in 2013, under the guidance of Gary Kulesha and Robin Elliott, and recently returned home to Canada after teaching at the University of Montana for three years. She is based in Edmonton, Alberta, where she is Assistant Professor at MacEwan University; and frequently returns home to Toronto for her position as Affiliate Composer with the TSO.

Her compositions have been performed/recorded across North and South America, Europe, and the UK, by Mark Takeshi McGregor, Women on the Verge, Ultraviolet, Duo Nyans, Vancouver Symphony, Cecilia String Quartet, Quatuor Bozzini, Arditti Quartet, Land’s End Ensemble, Luciane Cardassi, National Youth Orchestra of Canada, Thin Edge New Music Collective, Onyx Trio, 21C Festival, Winnipeg New Music Festival, and junctQín keyboard collective, among others. Her artistic practice has been recognized through numerous awards, including the Toronto Arts Foundation Emerging Artist Award (2015), and the Canadian Federation of University Women Elizabeth Massey Award (2012); she has also received support through the Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, The Banff Centre, Canadian Music Centre, University of Toronto, University of Montana, and the SOCAN Foundation.

Program note by David Perlman

Sergei Prokofiev

Concerto No. 1 in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 19

Born: Sontsovka, Russia, Apr 27, 1891

Died: Moscow, Russia, Mar 5, 1953

Composed: 1917

22
min

Prokofiev began his First Violin Concerto in early 1915, but completed it only in the summer of 1917—shortly before the revolution that would propel him into two decades of self-imposed exile in the West. The première, in Paris, on October 18, 1923, was a failure, for the fashionable Parisians thought the concerto insufficiently “modern.” The music is certainly characteristic of the avant-garde young Prokofiev in some ways (economy of form, expert craftsmanship, bold harmonies, motoric rhythms, irony), but the Parisians had a point: this is at heart a profoundly Romantic piece.

It is simple in form, unabashedly melodic, and deeply expressive; the music unfolds naturally and transparently, though it is often brilliant and virtuosic, too. Prokofiev noted five basic tendencies in his early work: classical, modern, motoric, lyrical, and “scherzo-ish” (i.e., whimsical, humorous, mocking). All five operate, to varying degrees, in this concerto, though the lyrical receives particular emphasis; indeed, the unconventional three-movement plan (slow–fast–moderate) places the more expansive and lyrical movements in the most dramatically important positions.

Prokofiev described the opening of the first movement as “meditative,” and marked the solo part here *sognando*—“dreaming.” The violin introduces the main theme over quietly trembling violas, and, as the theme unfolds at a leisurely pace, the orchestral accompaniment becomes increasingly

luxuriant. Like many 19th-century slow movements, this movement is in a three-part form (ABA), with musical tension building through a contrasting middle section and resolving in a reprise of the opening theme.

The *Scherzo* is an utter contrast—short, fast, tart, and hard-driving, as well as nervous and mischievous in character. The scoring is mercurial, the violin part brittle and percussive. Where the first movement was warmly and sincerely expressive, the *Scherzo* is savage and sarcastic—a diabolical dance in which relief is infrequent and brief.

In the finale, however, irony is quickly rejected in favour of renewed lyricism. No less melodic than the first movement, the finale is even richer, denser, and more intensely passionate; it unfolds as a seemingly endless outpouring of melody to which the whole orchestra makes a crucial contribution. The closing pages are radiant. Near the end, the opening theme of the first movement unexpectedly returns, and the concerto ends as it began—dreaming.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Dmitri Shostakovich

Symphony No. 10 in E Minor, Op. 93

Born: St. Petersburg, Russia, Sep 25, 1906

Died: Moscow, Russia, Aug 9, 1975

Composed: 1953

57
min

In 1948, in a notorious Communist Party decree, Shostakovich was condemned as a “formalist” whose music was not compatible with Soviet values. Only after the death of Stalin in March of 1953 would he risk going public with a new symphony—his Tenth, composed quickly that summer and fall. First performed in Leningrad on December 17, it aroused some heated criticism in official

ABOUT THE WORKS

circles (too modernistic, too gloomy), but was a great success with musicians and the public, and ultimately rescued Shostakovich's reputation and career.

The meaning of the Tenth Symphony is by no means simple, though. Shostakovich's own public comments on the work, tailored to Soviet tastes, offer little insight, often reading like parodies of Communist banalities: ("In this work, I wanted to convey human feelings and passions.") In *Testimony: The Memoirs of Shostakovich*, "related to and edited by" Solomon Volkov, and published in 1979, he is quoted as saying that in the Tenth he intended to depict the tragedy of Stalinism, and that the Scherzo was actually "a musical portrait of Stalin." But these words cannot be taken at face value either: there was and still is fractious debate about the authenticity of *Testimony*.

A Russian musicologist, Nelly Kravetz, in an article written in the mid-1990s, argues that that the elusive *Allegretto*, rather than being political, was inspired by a romantic fixation Shostakovich had developed for a former student, Elmira Nazirova—with the enigmatic, pastoral horn motto that haunts the middle of the movement being a musical monogram of her name, nestled within outer sections in which, for the first time, Shostakovich incorporated his own four-note musical monogram (D, E-flat, C, B-natural) in a work. Those four notes, according to the German musical alphabet, spelled "DSCH," his abbreviation for his own name, and it is a motif that goes on to haunt much of his later music. So, whatever the overall politics of the work may be, an "inner program" of a romantic nature seems also to be in play.

The symphony as a whole is predominantly tragic. The first movement is a dark and sometimes bitter meditation. A great dramatic arc, it builds to a furious, painfully

dissonant climax, in which massive brass sonorities are unleashed to overwhelming effect. But it ends as it began—in gloom. The concise *Allegro* that follows, by contrast, is mostly fast and furious *fortissimo*—raw, grim, and brutal. Whether it parodies Stalin or not, it offers a sinister portrait of power and violence wielded without constraint. Following the *Allegretto*, a sombre, portentous *Andante* introduces the symphony's upbeat *Allegro* finale.

Like many of Shostakovich's finales, this one is problematical. Some hear it as a sincere effort at a plausibly optimistic finale, in accord with Soviet aesthetics. Some hear it as a critique of those aesthetics—an enforced gaiety that implies an ironic or subversive stance. Others hear the movement as a cynical, bitter capitulation to authority—a betrayal of a tragic work. All, however, would likely agree that the finale is only superficially a "happy ending." The music is complex and mercurial both structurally and psychologically, eventually reacquiring the tragic power of the first movement. Its ambivalence suggests that its meaning—the meaning of the whole symphony, in fact—is both personal *and* political. It is a work, after all, that Shostakovich put his name not only *on*, but *in*.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana

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 his detailed biography, please turn to page 12.



Karen Gomyo violin

Karen Gomyo made her TSO debut in April 2004.

Praised by the *Chicago Tribune* as “a first-rate artist of real musical command, vitality, brilliance, and intensity,” violinist Karen Gomyo continues to captivate audiences worldwide. Upcoming engagements include returns to the Minnesota Orchestra, Dresden

Philharmonic, Zagreb Philharmonic, Nashville Symphony, Sydney Symphony, Melbourne Symphony, the BBC Scottish in Glasgow and Perth, St. Louis Symphony, Bamberg Symphoniker, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Utah Symphony, Orchestre de Pau, Detroit Symphony, and Polish National Radio Symphony in Katowice.

Last year’s season highlights included débuts with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Jakub Hrůša, and the Royal Northern Sinfonia with Karina Canellakis, as well as returns to the San Francisco Symphony, Houston Symphony, Oregon Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Dallas Symphony, and WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln in Germany.

Strongly committed to contemporary works, in 2018 Karen Gomyo performed the world première of Samuel Adams’s new *Chamber Concerto* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen, to great critical acclaim. The work was written for her and commissioned by the CSO. She also performed the North American première of Matthias Pintscher’s *Concerto No. 2 “Mar’eh”* with the composer conducting the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington D.C., as well as Peteris Vasks’ *Vox Amoris* with the Lapland Chamber Orchestra conducted by John Storgårds.

Karen Gomyo has worked with the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony, Vienna Chamber Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, Stuttgart Radio Symphony, and Tokyo Symphony, among many others; and with such conductors as Sir Andrew Davis, Jaap van Zweden, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Louis Langrée, Simone Young, Thomas Dausgaard, James Gaffigan, Pinchas Zukerman, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Hannu Lintu, Vasily Petrenko, Jakub Hrůša, Cristian Măcelaru, and Thomas Søndergård.

Karen Gomyo is deeply interested in the Nuevo Tango music of Astor Piazzolla, and performs with Piazzolla’s longtime pianist and tango legend Pablo Ziegler, and his partners Hector del Curto (bandoneon), Claudio Ragazzi (electric guitar), and Pedro Giraudo (double bass). She also performs regularly with the Finnish guitarist Ismo Eskelinen, with whom she has appeared at the Dresden and Mainz Festivals in Germany, and in recitals in Helsinki and New York.

Karen Gomyo plays the “Aurora, ex-Foulis” Stradivarius violin of 1703 that was bought for her exclusive use by a private sponsor.