

Program Notes by Ken Meltzer

Overture, *Prince Igor*

Composed from 1869 to 1887 when Borodin's death left the work unfinished

Premiered on November 4, 1890 in St. Petersburg

ALEXANDER BORODIN

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia; November 12, 1833

Died in St. Petersburg, Russia; February 27, 1887

The first and only performance of this work by the Charlotte Symphony was on March 18, 1948 with Guy Hutchins conducting at the Armory Auditorium.

The strongest unified movement of Russian nationalist expression in 19th-century concert music occurred in the 1860s, with the formation of a group of composers dubbed by critic Vladimir Stassov as "The Five" or "The Mighty Handful." "The Five," organized by pianist and composer Mily Balakirev (1837-1910), also included Alexander Borodin (1833-1887), César Cui (1835-1918), Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881), and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). At the time of the group's formation, all except Balakirev were musical amateurs—Borodin was a chemist; Cui, an engineering officer; Mussorgsky, an officer of the Guards; and Rimsky-Korsakov, a naval officer.

Alexander Borodin's scientific career was quite distinguished. He was a prominent researcher and lecturer at the Medico-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg. His busy schedule made composition difficult. Borodin once confided to a friend: "I was never able to concentrate upon composition except during my summer holiday, or when some ailment compelled me to keep to my rooms." Despite these obstacles, such works as Borodin's symphonies, his orchestral piece, *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, and the opera *Prince Igor* demonstrate a genuine and individual talent for melody and orchestral color.

It was Stassov who, in 1869, suggested to Borodin that he create an opera based upon the epic *The Story of the Expedition of Igor*. Other commitments, both scientific and musical, prevented Borodin from devoting his full efforts to the opera. Borodin died in 1887 before completing *Prince Igor*. It was left to his friends Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov to finish the opera that finally premiered at the Maryinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, on November 4, 1890.

Borodin's *Prince Igor* has remained a staple of the Russian operatic repertoire. In addition, the Overture (completed by Glazunov) and the *Polovtsian Dances* have enjoyed a prominent, independent presence in the concert hall.

Duration: c. 10 minutes

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Opus 26

Composed 1857-1866

Premiered on April 24, 1866 in Koblenz, conducted by the composer.

MAX BRUCH

Born in Cologne, Germany; January 6, 1838

Died near Berlin, Germany; October 2, 1920

This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on October 17, 1941 with Guillermo S. de Roxlo conducting at the Armory Auditorium. The tenth and most recent performance was on March 20, 2002 with Christof Perick conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

German composer Max Bruch's musical works are prolific in number and span an impressive range of vocal and instrumental genres. Nevertheless, Bruch is chiefly remembered today for a handful of compositions—the two Violin Concertos (1866 and 1878), the *Scottish Fantasy* for Violin and Orchestra (1880), and the *Kol Nidre* for Cello and Orchestra (1881).

Bruch began composition of his First Violin Concerto at the age of nineteen, finally completing the work nine years later. The first performance took place on April 24, 1866, at a concert of the Music Institute of Koblenz on the Rhine. Bruch, then Music Director of Koblenz, conducted the Gürzenich Orchestra of Cologne. The orchestra's concertmaster, Otto von Königslöw, was the soloist.

Shortly after the premiere, Bruch forwarded the score to the preeminent violinist of the day, Joseph Joachim, for his review and advice. Bruch penned extensive revisions, and dedicated the final version of the concerto to Joachim, who gave its premiere in Bremen in 1868, with Bruch conducting. In 1906, at his 75th birthday party, Joachim stated: "The Germans have four violin concertos," and named those by Ludwig van Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn, Bruch, and Johannes Brahms. While Joachim praised each of these magnificent works, he commented: "Max Bruch wrote the richest and most enchanting of the four."

The concerto begins with a dramatic movement (*Vorspiel: Allegro moderato*), opening with a compelling dialogue between the orchestra and the soloist. The slow second movement (*Adagio*) features two lovely melodies, both introduced by the solo violin. The *Finale (Allegro energico)* presents an almost continuous series of technical challenges for the soloist, who concludes the concerto with a fiery, *presto* sequence.

Duration: c. 24 minutes

Introduction to *Khovantchina*

Composed in 1880

Premiered on February 21, 1886 in St. Petersburg, Russia

MODEST MUSSORGSKY

Born in Karevo, Russia; March 21, 1839

Died in St. Petersburg, Russia; March 28, 1881

These are the first performances of this work by the Charlotte Symphony.

The critic Vladimir Stasov suggested to Modest Mussorgsky the historical subject that led to *Khovantchina*, an opera the composer referred to as “A National Music Drama.” The story deals with a particularly turbulent period in Russian history (1682-89) that involved a clash between old and new régimes, culminating in the rise to power of Tsar Peter “The Great.” In 1872, Mussorgsky began to collect materials relating to the relevant historical period. In July of that year, Mussorgsky dedicated *Khovantchina* to Stasov.

Mussorgsky began composition of *Khovantchina* the following year. Although Mussorgsky continued to work on the opera during the remainder of his life, *Khovantchina*—like many of his compositions—remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1881. Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov revised, completed, and orchestrated *Khovantchina*, which received its premiere in St. Petersburg on February 21, 1886.

This concert features the lovely orchestral Introduction to *Khovantchina*, in a version prepared by Dmitri Shostakovich in 1960. Mussorgsky described the brief, atmospheric piece as depicting “Dawn on the Moscow River.”

Duration: c. 5 minutes

Symphony No. 9 in E-flat Major, Opus 70

Composed in 1945

Premiered in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) on November 3, 1945, conducted by Evgeny Mravinsky.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia; September 25, 1906

Died in Moscow; August 9, 1975

This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on March 20, 1974 with Jacques Brouman conducting at Ovens Auditorium. The third and most recent performance set was heard on March 19 & 20, 2004 with Christof Perick conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

In November of 1944, as Russia’s wartime fortunes improved, Dmitri Shostakovich wrote: “I have a dream—common, I should think to every Soviet artist—of creating a large-scale work which will express the powerful feelings we have today. I think that the epigraph to all our work in the next few years will be the simple but glorious word, ‘Victory.’”

Many anticipated that Shostakovich’s “dream” would manifest itself in his next symphony, the Ninth. Shostakovich confided to a friend: “I would like to write it for chorus and solo singers as well as an orchestra if I could find suitable material for the book and if I were not afraid that I might be suspected of wanting to draw immodest

analogies.” Here, Shostakovich was referring to another Ninth, Beethoven’s magnificent “Choral” Symphony (1824).

In January of 1945, Shostakovich began composing his Ninth Symphony. The composer shared some of the score with his associates. They described it as “powerful, victorious major music in a vigorous tempo,” and “majestic in scale, in pathos, in its breathtaking motion.”

But by the early spring of 1945, Shostakovich put that work aside. Abandoning the music he had written up to that point, Shostakovich began again in July of that year. He completed the Ninth Symphony on August 30, and the work received its premiere on November 3, 1945 with the Leningrad Philharmonic.

Those who had expected the Shostakovich Ninth to be modeled upon Beethoven’s “Choral” Symphony were stunned. Instead of an epic score with chorus and vocal soloists, the Shostakovich Ninth lasts just 25 minutes and features conventional orchestral forces. And rather than displaying the grand, heroic mood of Shostakovich’s original sketches, much of the music of this “Victory” Symphony is lighthearted, sometimes evoking the circus or silent film comedies.

Evgeny Mravinsky, who led the Ninth’s world premiere, defended the Symphony as “a work directed against philistinism...an original ‘symphonic broadside’ which ridicules complacency and bombast, the desire to ‘rest on one’s laurels’—attributes and a state of mind which were particularly dangerous at a time when the war had just ended and the task of healing its wounds lay ahead.”

Another explanation for Shostakovich’s about-face surfaced four years after the composer’s death with the book, *Testimony: the Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*. *Testimony*, compiled by Shostakovich’s friend and student, Solomon Volkov, purports to offer the Russian composer’s views on a number of subjects. According to the Shostakovich of *Testimony*:

(T)hey wanted a fanfare from me, an ode, they wanted me to write a majestic Ninth Symphony. It was very unfortunate, the business with the Ninth...

Everyone praised (Soviet dictator Joseph) Stalin, and now I was supposed to join in this unholy affair...

I confess that I gave hope to the leader and the teacher’s dreams. I announced that I was writing an apotheosis. I was trying to get them off my back but it turned against me. When my Ninth was performed, Stalin was incensed. He was deeply offended, because there was chorus, no soloists. And no apotheosis. There wasn’t even a paltry dedication. It was just music, which Stalin didn’t understand very well and which was of dubious content...

I couldn't write an apotheosis to Stalin, I simply couldn't. I knew what I was in for when I wrote the Ninth.

It should be noted that the authenticity of *Testimony* remains the subject of heated debate. Nevertheless, it is quite telling that Shostakovich's next Symphony, the Tenth, did not appear until 1953—after the death of Joseph Stalin.

The Ninth Symphony is in five movements. The first (*Allegro*) is in sonata form, a structure favored by such 18th-century composers as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Franz Joseph Haydn. The spirit of “Papa” Haydn is also present in the *Allegro*'s pervasive wit and humor. A solo clarinet sings the second movement's (*Moderato*) flowing, central melody. The final three movements are played without pause. The third (*Presto*) serves as the Symphony's lighthearted Scherzo. The brief fourth movement (*Largo*) begins in dramatic fashion, with powerful exclamations by the trombones and tuba, capped by a cymbal crash. The finale (*Allegretto*) opens in far more playful fashion. The whirlwind of activity culminates with a helter-skelter dash to the finish.

Duration: c. 27 minutes