

**Program Notes by Ken Meltzer**

**OVERTURE TO *LA FORZA DEL DESTINO***

**Composed in 1862**

**Premiered on November 10, 1862 at the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia**

**GUISEPPE VERDI**

**Born in Roncole, Italy; October 9 or 10, 1813**

**Died in Milan, Italy; January 27, 1901**

**This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on October 15 & 16, 1969 with Jacques Brouman conducting at Ovens Auditorium and at Johnson C. Smith University. The eighth and most recent performance was on October 6, 2001, with Christof Perick conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.**

In 1861, the famous dramatic tenor Enrico Tamberlick proposed that Giuseppe Verdi compose an opera—based upon any story the eminent Italian composer wished—for the Imperial Theater of St. Petersburg, Russia. Verdi finally decided upon a sprawling 1830s Spanish play, *Don Alvaro, or The Force of Destiny*, by Angel Pérez de Saavedra, Duke of Rivas. Francesco Maria Piave, Verdi's librettist for several works, including *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, and *La traviata*, adapted the work for the operatic stage. The premiere took place in St. Petersburg on November 10, 1862.

Although *Forza* was a success with the public, Verdi felt the score was not sufficiently concise. Verdi finally revised the opera for an 1869 carnival season production at the La Scala Opera House in Milan. By that time, Piave had suffered a debilitating stroke. Verdi called upon the services of Antonio Ghislanzoni to assist him in reworking the libretto. The revised *La forza del destino*, which premiered at La Scala on February 27, 1869, was a resounding triumph and continues to be the version performed in opera houses around the world.

The opera's tale is simple enough. Don Alvaro accidentally kills the Marquis of Calatrava—the father of the woman he loves, Leonora di Vargas. Don Carlo, the Marquis's son, searches for Don Alvaro and Leonora in order to avenge his father's death. Don Carlo finally confronts Don Alvaro (now a priest), and challenges him to a duel. Don Alvaro mortally wounds Don Carlo, who in turn fatally stabs Leonora when she tries to comfort her brother. Don Alvaro curses the fates, but when he finally prays for forgiveness, Leonora dies in peace.

Verdi composed a Prelude for the original 1862 version of *La forza del destino* that he revised into the famous Overture for the 1869 La Scala production. Typical of overtures of the time, it incorporates various melodies from the opera. It is a magnificent orchestral showpiece that remains Verdi's most popular overture in the concert hall.

*The score calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, and strings.*

Duration: ca. 8 minutes

***POLOVTSIAN DANCES FROM PRINCE IGOR***

**Composed 1869-1875**

**The *Polovtsian Dances* premiered on February 27, 1879 in St. Petersburg, Russia, with the composer conducting. The opera premiered on November 4, 1890 at the Maryinsky Theater in St. Petersburg.**

**ALEXANDER BORODIN**

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

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

**This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on November 20, 1956 with James Christian Pfohl conducting at Ovens Auditorium. The sixteenth and most recent performance was on March 15, 2006 with Alan Yamamoto conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.**

Alexander Borodin was a member of the famous group of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian nationalist composers, dubbed by critic Vladimir Stasov as “The Five,” or the “Mighty Handful.” Borodin’s colleagues included Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The members of “The Five” or “Mighty Handful” attempted to create a distinctly Russian form of musical expression.

In addition to his talents as a composer, Alexander Borodin was a noted and respected chemist, a professor at the Medical-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg.

Alexander Borodin died in St. Petersburg in 1887, at the age of 53, and at the time, he was still at work on his only opera, *Prince Igor*, which he had begun in 1869. The libretto, by the composer, was based upon a play by Stasov, in turn derived from an early Russian poem, *The Song of Igor*.

After Borodin’s death, Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov assumed the task of completing *Prince Igor*. The work finally received its premiere at the Maryinsky Theater in St. Petersburg on November 4, 1890. Its patriotic themes, beautiful melodies, and lush orchestration immediately caught the imagination of the audience and have continued to earn *Prince Igor* an important place in Russian operatic repertoire.

In 1875, Borodin did complete the beloved *Polovtsian Dances*, first presented in a St. Petersburg concert on February 27, 1879. The *Dances* have become one of the most popular of concert works. Excerpts from that piece and other Borodin compositions served as the basis for Wright and Forrest’s huge Broadway success *Kismet* (1953), subtitled “A Musical Arabian Night.”

*Prince Igor* takes place in Russia in 1185. Prince Igor and his son Vladimir attempt to defeat the Polovtsians, and their leader Khan Konchak, who are marching against the city of Putivl. Igor and Vladimir are taken prisoner by Konchak, who entertains them with the presentation of a series of Polovtsian dances.

*The score calls for mixed chorus, two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.*

Duration: ca. 14 minutes

**SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN E MINOR, OP. 27**

**Composed 1906-07**

**Premiered on January 26, 1908, with the composer conducting**

**SERGEI RACHMANINOFF**

**Born in Semyonovo, Russia; April 1, 1873**

**Died in Beverly Hills, California; March 28, 1943**

**This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on October 15, 1962 with Henry Janiec conducting at Ovens Auditorium. The sixth and most recent performance set was on February 16 & 17, 2001 with Uriel Segal conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.**

Sergei Rachmaninoff completed his First Symphony in August of 1895. At the time, he was 22 and filled with the confidence of youth. "I imagined that there was nothing I could not do and had great hopes for the future," he later recalled. Thanks in large part to the efforts of composers Sergei Taneyev and Alexander Glazunov, the First Symphony received its premiere in St. Petersburg on March 15, 1897.

Glazunov conducted, but apparently didn't do much to advance the cause of Rachmaninoff's new composition. A few months later, Rachmaninoff lamented to his friend, Alexander Zatayevich: "I am amazed how such a highly talented man as Glazunov can conduct so badly."

Rachmaninoff remained backstage during the entire March 15 premiere. After the wretched performance, Rachmaninoff escaped to the street, rather than face the audience's negative reaction. Still, he could not avoid the ire of such critics as composer César Cui, who wrote:

If there were a conservatory in Hell, if one of its many talented students were instructed to write a programme symphony on the "Seven Plagues of Egypt," and if he were to compose a symphony like Mr. Rachmaninoff's, then he would have fulfilled his task brilliantly and would delight the inhabitants of Hell.

The First Symphony was neither performed again nor published during the composer's lifetime.

The disastrous premiere of the First Symphony precipitated a three-year crisis for the young Rachmaninoff, who lost all confidence in his abilities as a composer: "A paralyzing apathy possessed me. I did nothing at all and found no pleasure in anything. Half my days were spent lying on a couch and sighing over my ruined life."

But in 1900, a breakthrough occurred. On the advice of relatives, Rachmaninoff consulted Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a psychiatrist who used hypnosis in the treatment of his patients. The consultations with Dr. Dahl were an extraordinary success. Rachmaninoff experienced a tremendous resurgence of confidence and immediately began to compose his magnificent Second Piano Concerto (1901), a work he dedicated to Dr. Dahl.

Rachmaninoff even summoned the courage to attempt another Symphony. In the fall of 1906, Rachmaninoff and his family moved from their native Russia to Dresden, Germany. The relocation offered Rachmaninoff the solitude he needed to devote himself entirely to composition. In October, Rachmaninoff began his Second Symphony, and finished the first draft on New Year's Day, 1907.

Rachmaninoff later refined the score of his Second Symphony and conducted its premiere in St. Petersburg on January 26, 1908. The work's favorable reception by the audience and critics did much to vindicate Rachmaninoff after the humiliating premiere of his First Symphony. The Second Symphony proved to be immensely popular throughout Rachmaninoff's life, and remains one of his most beloved orchestral works. The rich orchestration and passionate melodies make it one of the finest Russian symphonies of the late Romantic era.

The first movement of the Rachmaninoff Symphony No. 2 opens with a slow introduction (*Largo*). The cellos and basses intone a motif that will serve as the basis for much of the Symphony's thematic material. The principal *Allegro moderato* portion of the movement features two central themes, the second of which reaches its full outpouring in the slow third movement. The second movement scherzo (*Allegro molto*) opens with the robust central theme that alternates with contrasting episodes. The slow movement (*Adagio*) is based upon two melodies that are presented at the outset of the movement. The first, played by the violins, is one of Rachmaninoff's most beloved and unforgettable inspirations. A solo clarinet introduces the second melody, marked *espressivo e cantabile*. The remainder of the third movement is a flowing and expansive rhapsody on these two beautiful melodies. The stirring finale (*Allegro vivace*) juxtaposes new themes with echoes of the previous movements. The music that served to open the finale serves as basis for the Symphony's exuberant conclusion.

*The score calls for three flutes and piccolo, three oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.*

Duration: ca. 60 minutes