KALAMAZOO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

JULIAN KUERTI
MUSIC DIRECTOR

GERSHWIN:
Rhapsodies

Saturday, October 26, 2019 | 8 p.m. | Miller Auditorium
Daniel Brier, Conductor
Kevin Cole, Piano

— Wiser Financial Prelude | 7 p.m. —

LIGETI
1923 – 2006
Concert Românesc (Romanian Concerto)
Andantino
Allegro vivace
Adagio ma non troppo
Molto vivace-Presto

GERSHWIN
1898 – 1937
Rhapsody in Blue
Kevin Cole, piano

— Intermission —

GERSHWIN
New York Rhapsody
Kevin Cole, piano

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
1844 – 1908
Capriccio espagnol, Op. 34
Alborada
Variazioni
Alborada
Scena e canto gitano
Fandango asturiano

— AfterWORDS discussion with conductor and guests —

Please see page 28–30 of 2019–2020 Program Book for more information on this performance.

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Notes about the composers and compositions written by Peter Laki, Visiting Associate Professor of Music, Bard College Berlin Conservatory of Music, with light editing from the KSO

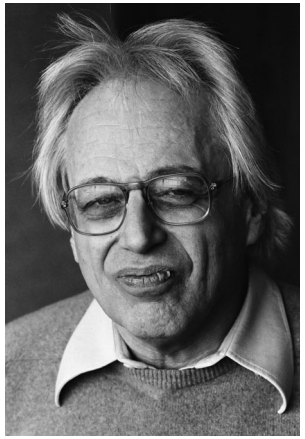

Photo: Carl Van Vechten

GYÖRGY LIGETI

Concert Românesc

Born: May 28, 1923, in Dicsőszentmárton, Transylvania, Hungary (now Târnăveni, Romania)

Died: June 12, 2006, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1951; he revised it in the mid-1990s and published its new version in 1996

World Premiere: In a private orchestral rehearsal in Budapest in the 1950s, but it was not officially premiered until August 21, 1971, at the Peninsula Music Festival in the Gibraltar Auditorium, Fish Creek, Wisconsin, with Thor Johnson conducting The Festival Orchestra

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns (the 3rd seated at a distance from the others and fulfilling an echo function), 2 trumpets, cymbals, suspended cymbal, snare drum, bass drum, and strings

Duration: About 14 minutes

The Composer and His Time

Postwar Hungary was not an easy place for young composers. The road they had to travel was extremely straight and narrow, defined by the confluence of various political and artistic constraints. Politically, these were the worst years of Stalinism when the doorbell could ring in the middle of the night and anyone with suspected bourgeois sympathies could be taken away to undisclosed locations. A composer had to sing the praises of the working classes day and night and use as much folkloristic material as possible. At the same time, the idea that new concert music should be based on folk music predated Communism in Hungary and had been advocated for decades by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, neither of whom were Communists. Bartók had died in his self-imposed American exile in 1945, but Kodály was very much alive, as the reigning spirit of Hungarian cultural life until his death in 1967.

Born in 1923 to Hungarian parents in Transylvania, which had only become part of Romania five years earlier, Ligeti had moved to Budapest in 1945, but returned to Romania in 1949/50 to conduct folk music research. In 1956, he fled to the West where he quickly became one of the leaders of the musical avant-garde. Yet in later years, he began to show a certain fondness for this early essay, so different from his mature works. The concerto received its belated public premiere in the 1970s, and was subsequently published and recorded, with the number of performances steadily increasing ever since.

The Composition

Young composers seemed to have little choice but to follow in the footsteps of their elders. Yet György Ligeti was not cut out to be an epigone. He dutifully collected and arranged folksongs, but in his hands, the material somehow sounded different. His first purely symphonic work, the *Romanian Concerto,* walks a fine line between mandatory folklorism and original ideas that already begin to challenge the system, however tentatively. As we shall see presently, Ligeti went beyond the practice of Bartók and Kodály in the use of natural overtones and other novel instrumental effects.

The four-movement concerto follows a slow-fast-slow-fast outline reminiscent of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta,* although the movements follow one another without pauses. The opening *Andantino* resembles a *colinda,* or Romanian Christmas carol; it has the same typical melodic elements and mixed meters. First presented in unison, it is repeated with harmonies added, in different orchestrations. The second movement is an energetic folk dance, with a prominent violin solo that conjures up direct associations with Transylvanian village fiddlers.

In addition to the two horns in the orchestra, Ligeti required a third horn, to be seated separately, at a distance, echoing the first horn—an arrangement that dominates the third movement, *Adagio ma non troppo.* The composer further instructed the horn players to play natural overtones even if they don't sound "in tune" according to the well-tempered system. He always retained his special love for "out-of-tune" harmonics, as we can see from such late works as the Violin Concerto (1992) and his final composition, the Hamburg Concerto for solo horn, string orchestra and four natural horns.

The last movement begins with a direct allusion to the finale from Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra.* But the scurrying string figures are much more mysterious and more intensely chromatic than the corresponding passage in the Bartók, at times presaging Ligeti's intricate "micro-polyphonies" from the sixties. Then the dancing begins anew. The solo violin and the accompanying violin and viola with their open strings suggest a village band. At one point, the two violas, two cellos and two basses are instructed to play "quasi timpani," that is, to create a percussive effect by plucking the strings very precisely, close

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to the bridge. As the excitement grows, the orchestra interjects some heavy downstrokes coming at the most unexpected moments. Just before the end, the horns of the third movement are briefly recalled, only to be interrupted by the final downbeat.

György Ligeti on his *Romanian Concerto:*

> I grew up in a Hungarian-speaking environment in Transylvania. While the official language was Romanian, it was only in secondary school that I learned to speak the language that had seemed so mysterious to me as a child. I was three when I first encountered Romanian folk music, an alpenhorn player in the Carpathian Mountains, and later an encounter with some masked Romanian "magicians". The alpenhorn (called a "bucium" in Romanian) sounded completely different from "normal" music. Today I know that this stems from the fact that the alpenhorn produces only the notes of its natural harmonic series and that the fifth and seventh harmonics (i.e. the major third and minor seventh) seem "out of tune" because they sound lower than on the piano, for example. But it is this sense of "wrongness" that is in fact what is "right" about the instrument, as it represents the specific "charm" of the horn timbre.
>
> Once, around New Year's, some wild musicians playing violin and bagpipe ("cimpoi") forced their way into our courtyard. One of them wore a mask with horns, which instead of a mouth had a kind of beak and, cloaked in a goatskin cape, he looked like a diabolical goat. The tradition of shamanistic magic was still very much alive among Romanian shepherds and, in Transylvania, woodland spirits were portrayed in exactly the same way as, for instance, in West Africa. The "goat" romped around for a while, pinching the women, tormenting the terrified children and then, shoving back its mask, demanded money.
>
> In 1949, when I was twenty-six, I learned how to transcribe folksongs from wax cylinders at the Folklore Institute in Bucharest. Many of these melodies stuck in my memory and led in 1951 to the composition of my Romanian Concerto. However, not everything in it is genuinely Romanian as I also invented elements in the spirit of the village bands. I was later able to hear the piece at an orchestral rehearsal in Budapest—a public performance had been forbidden....The peculiar way in which village bands harmonised their music, often full of dissonances and "against the grain", was regarded as incorrect. In the fourth movement of my Romanian Concerto there is a passage in which an F sharp is heard in the context of F major. This was reason enough for the apparatchiks responsible for the arts to ban the entire piece....

GEORGE GERSHWIN

Rhapsody in Blue

New York Rhapsody (Second Rhapsody)

Born: September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, New York

Died: July 11, 1937, Hollywood, California

Rhapsody in Blue

Composed: Gershwin composed *Rhapsody in Blue* from January 7 through February 3, 1924, with Ferde Grofé creating the work's original scoring for solo piano with jazz band

World Premiere: The work premiered February 12, 1924, at New York's Aeolian Hall, with Paul Whiteman leading his orchestra and the composer as piano soloist

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 2 alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, 3 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, suspended cymbal, glockenspiel, triangle, bass drum, tamtam, strings, and solo piano

Duration: About 16 mins

The Composition

"When the Rhapsody ended, there were several seconds of silence and then all hell broke loose," writes Charles Schwartz in his Gershwin biography, describing the first performance of *Rhapsody in Blue.* The work was heard at the end of a long concert given by the famous bandleader Paul Whiteman and labelled, somewhat ambitiously, an "Experiment in Modern Music." In reality, all Whiteman wanted was to have popular tunes arranged for a classical orchestra to enhance the respectability of jazz among a high-brow audience.

It was for this concert that Whiteman had commissioned the *Rhapsody* from Gershwin. He invited musicians like Jascha Heifetz, Fritz Kreisler, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Leopold Stokowski to come and witness the great "experiment," which, however, rapidly began to degenerate into quite a boring affair—until, that is, the 27-year-old George Gershwin came on stage.

"Whiteman gave a downbeat," Schwartz writes, "and [Ross] Gorman began his clarinet solo. At the sound of the clarinet, with its opening 'wail,' the audience became as if transfixed. Jolted by the exuberant, unexpected beginning, they were rooted in their seats, their ennui and restlessness disappearing as if by magic....It was unmistakably clear as the *Rhapsody* continued that it was generating a vitality and cohesiveness that are only too infrequently encountered in creative works. The *Rhapsody* seemed to have something pertinent to say and was saying it forcefully and directly, with personality and conviction."

The work had originally been entitled simply "American Rhapsody." According to another Gershwin biographer, Edward Jablonski, the title *Rhapsody in Blue* came from Gershwin's brother and collaborator, Ira. After visiting a gallery and seeing some paintings by James McNeill Whistler—with titles such as "Nocturne in Black and Gold" and "Arrangement in Gray and Black"—Ira thought, "why not a musical *Rhapsody in Blue*?"

Although notated precisely in score, the *Rhapsody* contains a quasi-improvisatory quality in the loose and unpredictable way its various sections follow one another; a sense of order is restored at the end when two of the main themes return. Elements of jazz and Western classical music are combined in a way that many composers, both American and European, have sought to emulate, though few can be said to have succeeded as well as Gershwin. The extraordinary success of this work catapulted Gershwin, already a noted presence on Tin Pan Alley and Broadway, into fame as a composer of serious music. The *Rhapsody* is a landmark composition, one of the first American concert pieces to become truly popular both at home and abroad.

Gershwin himself stressed the distinctive American quality of his work: "In the *Rhapsody* I tried to express our manner of living, the tempo of our modern life with its speed and chaos and vitality. I didn't try to paint definitive descriptive pictures in sound...I consider the *Rhapsody* as embodying an assimilation of feeling rather than presenting specific scenes of American life in music."

New York Rhapsody (Second Rhapsody)

Composed: Gershwin composed his second rhapsody in 1931 and 1932, setting out to write "the best music I could possibly think of"

World Premiere: The work premiered at Symphony Hall, Boston, on January 29, 1932, with Serge Koussevitzky conducting and the composer as piano soloist

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets and bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, xylophone, cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, wood block, strings, and solo piano

Duration: About 16 mins

The Composition

Gershwin's second rhapsody never achieved the popularity of the first—a fate that many sequels seem to share. Yet the composer attached great significance to the fact that he was able to orchestrate this work himself, unlike *Rhapsody in Blue,* which had been orchestrated by Ferde Grofé. Having been commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Gershwin felt that he had finally joined the ranks of the

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acknowledged composers of classical music and, as biographer Joan Peyser has written, "with his work he was saying to [Aaron] Copland and all the other serious composers—many of whom had also been commissioned by Koussevitzky to write scores for the Boston orchestra's anniversary—that he was one of them." The premiere took place at Boston's Symphony Hall on January 29, 1932, with the BSO led by Koussevitzky and with Gershwin at the piano.

The *Second Rhapsody* started life as movie music, for a film titled *Delicious* that Gershwin was working on while in Hollywood in 1931. In the movie, a fictional composer, speaking with a Russian accent, was narrating over the strains of what was originally called *New York Rhapsody:*

> It begins like we all see the city first, the great towers almost in the clouds. Down below, in the long furrows, human seeds trying to grow to the light. And noise: riveters drumming your ear from every side. And this is the night motif: night, silencing the rivets.

In fact, another provisional title for the work, now morphed into a concert piece, was *Rhapsody in Rivets.* Finally, Gershwin opted for the more neutral *Second Rhapsody.* Yet no matter what the title is, it is certainly a "riveting" piece of music!

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Capriccio espagnol, Op. 34

Born: March 18, 1844, Tikhvin, near Novgorod, Russia

Died: June 21, 1908, Liubensk, near Saint Petersburg, Russia

Composed: Summer of 1887

World Premiere: The first performance occurred on October 31, 1887, with the St. Petersburg Opera Orchestra

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, castanets, harp, strings

Duration: About 15 minutes

The Composition

"According to my plans, the *Capriccio* was to glitter with dazzling orchestral color, and manifestly, I had not been wrong"—wrote Rimsky-Korsakov in his autobiography, titled *My Musical Life.* The *Capriccio espagnol,* completed in the summer of 1887, was an instant success even before the premiere: the musicians of the Imperial Opera orchestra in St. Petersburg applauded each section already at the first rehearsal. Then after the first performance, an enthusiastic audience demanded that the entire piece be immediately repeated.

Rimsky-Korsakov was not the first Russian composer to be attracted to the landscapes and music of the Mediterranean. Tchaikovsky wrote his *Capriccio italien* seven years earlier. Both composers were preceded, and inspired, by Mikhail Glinka, the "father of Russian music," as he was called: Glinka had composed his *Capriccio brillante,* based on the jota dance of Spain's Aragon region, in 1845. Glinka had spent a great deal of time in Spain, just as Tchaikovsky wrote his *Italian Capriccio* in Italy. Rimsky-Korsakov, on the other hand, had stopped in Spain only briefly while, as a young naval officer, he was returning from a three-year voyage that had taken him to the United States and South America. The tunes used in the *Capriccio* came to him from a book of Spanish folk music; his personal copy has been preserved, containing all the authentic melodies that found their way into the score.

Rimsky-Korsakov could have arranged the Spanish folk melodies in a suite, where the different tunes followed one another in a loose sequence. Instead, he chose to give the work a sense of unity by organizing it around a main melody, heard at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. This melody is called *Alborada,* or "dawn song." Alboradas are usually played on the bagpipe to the accompaniment of a side-drum. (Another famous work inspired by this musical form is Ravel's *Alborada del gracioso.)*

The lively *Alborada* is followed by a set of slow variations, whose simple melody is repeated several times, played by varying instrumental combinations. After the return of the *Alborada,* we move on to a section called *Scene and Gypsy Song,* which opens with a series of virtuoso cadenzas (the first for horns and trumpets, and then one each for violin, flute, clarinet, and harp). Then, finally, the orchestra launches into the impassioned Gypsy song. The colorful *Fandango*—another Spanish dance—ends with the return of the now-familiar *Alborada.*

About the Author

Peter Laki, who wrote the composer notes, was born in Budapest, Hungary, where he studied musicology at the Franz Liszt Conservatory (currently University) of Music. After further studies in Paris, he moved to the United States, where he received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. Among other positions, he has worked as Program Annotator and Lecturer for the Cleveland Orchestra, and has taught at Case Western Reserve University and Oberlin College. Since 2007, he has served as Visiting Associate Professor at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Laki is the editor of "Bartók and His World" (Princeton University Press, 1995). He has published numerous articles, mostly—though not exclusively—on Bartók and other Hungarian composers and presented papers at international conferences in the United States, Canada, Hungary, Germany, France, and Italy.

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