

# GREEN BAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Stephen D'Agostino, *Conductor*  
Livia Sohn, *Violin*

Saturday, November 14, 2009

MIKHAIL GLINKA (1804-1857)  
Overture to *Ruslan and Ludmilla*

MAX BRUCH (1838-1920)  
Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26

- I. Prelude: Allegro moderato —
- II. Adagio
- III. Finale: Allegro energico

— INTERMISSION —

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)  
Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92

- I. Poco sostenuto — Vivace
- II. Allegretto
- III. Presto
- IV. Allegro con brio

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Overture to *Ruslan and Ludmilla*

Mikhail Glinka

Born June 1, 1804 in Smolensk, Russia

Died February 15, 1857 in Berlin

*Composed beginning in the late 1830s; completed in 1842.*

*Premiered on December 9, 1842 in St. Petersburg.*

*Scored for woodwinds in pairs plus contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.*

Mikhail Glinka was the father of Russian concert music. When his first opera, *A Life for the Czar* (also known as *Ivan Susanin*), appeared in 1836, it was hailed as a breakthrough in the use of native folk music as the basis of a serious musical work. The opera, whose plot was based on an incident from Russian history in which the people played a vital role, was an immediate popular success and had a profound influence on such later nationalistic composers as Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Prokofiev and Shostakovich. Important not only in his own country, Glinka was the first Russian composer whose works received widespread attention outside his native land.

Glinka was born into a noble family in Smolensk and educated for a life in government service. His real interest, however, was music, which he studied informally from childhood. On a recuperative visit to the Caucasus in 1823, he discovered the treasures of Russian folk song from the local peasants and determined to become a professional musician. During four tedious years of service in the Ministry of Roads and Communications (1824-1828), he wrote a number of songs and studied composition and performance with several eminent teachers, among whom the British pianist John Field is the best remembered. While on a visit to Italy in 1830, Glinka met the celebrated opera composers Bellini and Donizetti. He learned from them much about the techniques of writing for the musical stage and began to visualize a distinctly Russian musical style that would combine the melodies, harmonies and rhythms of the folk and church styles of his native land with the form and drama of Italian opera. He returned home at his father's death and began work on the epochal *A Life for the Czar*.

*Ruslan and Ludmilla* of 1842, the second of Glinka's two operas, was less well received than the earlier *A Life for the Czar* because it moved somewhat away from the folksy style of the first opera toward a more elevated idiom. It was not until after the composer's death that *Ruslan and Ludmilla* acquired its popular success. Glinka spent most of his final years in travel. In Spain, he collected folk songs which he employed in two orchestral works. In Paris in 1844, he met Berlioz, who had high praise for the orchestral concerts the Russian composer gave in the French capital. Glinka lived for three years in Warsaw and died in Berlin while on a visit in 1857 to Siegfried Dehn, one of his composition teachers.

The libretto of *Ruslan and Ludmilla* is based on Pushkin's fairy tale. Just prior to her betrothal to Ruslan, Ludmilla has been spirited away from her father, the Grand Duke of Kiev, by the evil dwarf Tchernomor. Ruslan perseveres through many fantastic adventures to regain his beloved, and they are finally united in marriage in the opera's final scene. The exuberant Overture is based on themes from the opera. The opening section uses two melodies from the marriage scene — the tutti chord and rushing scales of the first measures, and the fleet theme presented by the strings and flutes. The contrasting, lyrical second theme (played by bassoons, violas and cellos) is from Ruslan's second-act aria in which he sings of his love for Ludmilla. The development section employs all three themes. The recapitulation begins with the rushing scales and the fleet melody, and continues with an abbreviated version of the second theme. The coda, like the development, uses all three melodies, but adds to them a descending whole-tone scale in the basses. This was the first use of this melodic device in an opera — here depicting the evil dwarf — that was to become a common technique in the music of the French Impressionist composers a half-century later. The pesky dwarf is quickly banished, and the Overture ends with an energetic galop as the fitting conclusion to this fantastic tale.

## Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26

Max Bruch

Born January 6, 1838 in Cologne

Died October 20, 1920 in Friedenau, near Berlin

*Composed in 1865-1866.*

*Premiered on April 24, 1866 in Coblenz, with Otto von Königslöw as soloist and the composer conducting.*

*Scored for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.*

Max Bruch, widely known and respected in his day as a composer, conductor and teacher, received his earliest music instruction from his mother, a noted singer and pianist. He began composing at eleven, and, by fourteen, had produced a symphony and a string quartet, the latter garnering a prize that allowed him to study with Karl Reinecke and Ferdinand Hiller in Cologne. His opera *Die Loreley* (1862) and the choral work *Frithjof* (1864) brought him his first public acclaim. For the next 25 years, Bruch held various posts as a choral and orchestral conductor in Cologne, Coblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Liverpool and Breslau; in 1883, he visited the United States to conduct concerts of his own choral compositions. From 1890 to 1910, he taught composition at the Berlin Academy and received numerous awards for his work, including an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. Though Bruch is known mainly for three famous compositions for string soloist and orchestra (the G minor Concerto and the *Scottish Fantasy* for violin, and the *Kol Nidrei* for cello), he also composed two other violin concertos, three symphonies, a concerto for two pianos, various chamber pieces, songs, three operas and much choral music.

The G minor Violin Concerto brought Bruch his earliest and most enduring fame. He began sketching ideas for the piece in 1857, when he was a nineteen-year-old student just finishing his studies with Ferdinand Hiller in Cologne, but they only came to fruition in 1865, at the start of his two-year tenure as director of the Royal Institute for Music at Coblenz. The piece was not only Bruch's first concerto but also his first large work for orchestra, so he sought the advice of Johann Naret-Koning, concertmaster at Mannheim, concerning matters of violin technique and instrumental balance. The Concerto was ready for performance by April 1866 with Naret-Koning slated as soloist, but illness forced him to cancel, and Otto von Königslöw, concertmaster of the Gürzenich Orchestra and violin professor at the Cologne Conservatory, took over at the last minute. This public hearing convinced Bruch that repairs were needed, so he temporarily withdrew the Concerto while he revised and refined it during the next year with the meticulous advice of the eminent violinist and composer Joseph Joachim (who was to provide similar assistance to Johannes Brahms a decade later with his Violin Concerto). Joachim was soloist in the premiere of the definitive version of the Concerto, on January 7, 1868 in Bremen; he received the score's dedication in appreciation from Bruch. The Concerto was an enormous hit, spreading Bruch's reputation across Europe and, following its first performance in New York in 1872 by Pablo de Sarasate, America.

The G minor Violin Concerto is a work of lyrical beauty and emotional sincerity. The first movement, which Bruch called a "Prelude," is in the nature of an extended introduction leading without pause into the slow movement. The Concerto opens with a dialogue between soloist and orchestra followed by a wide-ranging subject played by the violinist over a pizzicato line in the basses. A contrasting theme reaches into the highest register of the violin. A stormy section for orchestra alone recalls the opening dialogue, which softens to usher in the lovely *Adagio*. This slow movement contains three important themes, all languorous and sweet, which are shared by soloist and orchestra. The music builds to a passionate climax before subsiding to a tranquil close. The finale begins with eighteen modulatory bars containing hints of the upcoming theme before the soloist proclaims the vibrant melody itself. A broad melody, played first by the orchestra alone before being taken over by the soloist, serves as the second theme. A brief development, based on the dance-like first theme, leads to the recapitulation. The coda recalls again the first theme to bring the work to a rousing close.

## Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn

Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna

*Composed in 1811-1812.*

*Premiered on December 8, 1813 in Vienna, under the composer's direction.*

*Scored for woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings.*

In the autumn of 1813, Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, the inventor of the metronome, approached Beethoven with the proposal that the two organize a concert to benefit the soldiers wounded at the recent Battle of Hanau — with, perhaps, two or three repetitions of the concert to benefit themselves. Beethoven was eager to have the as-yet-unheard A major Symphony of the preceding year performed, and thought the financial reward worth the trouble, so he agreed. The concert consisted of this “Entirely New Symphony” by Beethoven, marches by Dussek and Pleyel performed on a “Mechanical Trumpeter” fabricated by Mälzel, and an orchestral arrangement of *Wellington's Victory*, a piece Beethoven had concocted the previous summer for yet another of Mälzel's musical machines, the “Panharmonicon.” The evening was such a success that Beethoven's first biographer, Anton Schindler, reported, “All persons, however they had previously dissented from his music, now agreed to award him his laurels.”

The Seventh Symphony is a magnificent creation in which Beethoven displayed several technical innovations that were to have a profound influence on the music of the 19th century: he expanded the scope of symphonic structure through the use of more distant tonal areas; he brought an unprecedented richness and range to the orchestral palette; and he gave a new awareness of rhythm as the vitalizing force in music. It is particularly the last of these characteristics that most immediately affects the listener, and to which commentators have consistently turned to explain the vibrant power of the work. Perhaps the most famous such observation about the Seventh Symphony is that of Richard Wagner, who called the work “the apotheosis of the Dance in its highest aspect ... the loftiest deed of bodily motion incorporated in an ideal world of tone.” “Beethoven,” John N. Burk explained, “seems to have built up this impression by willfully driving a single rhythmic figure through each movement, until the music attains (particularly in the body of the first movement and in the Finale) a swift propulsion, an effect of cumulative growth which is akin to extraordinary size.”

A slow introduction, almost a movement in itself, opens the Symphony. This initial section employs two themes: the first, majestic and unadorned, is passed down through the winds while being punctuated by long, rising scales in the strings; the second is a graceful melody for oboe. The transition to the main part of the first movement is accomplished by the superbly controlled reiteration of a single pitch. This device both connects the introduction with the exposition and also establishes the dactylic rhythm that dominates the movement. The *Allegretto* scored such a success at its premiere that it was immediately encored, a phenomenon virtually unprecedented for a slow movement. In form, the movement is a series of variations on the heartbeat rhythm of its opening measures. In spirit, however, it is more closely allied to the austere chaconne of the Baroque era than to the light, figural variations of Classicism.

The third movement, a study in contrasts of sonority and dynamics, is built on the formal model of the scherzo, but expanded to include a repetition of the horn-dominated Trio (Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo). In the finale, Beethoven not only produced music of virtually unmatched rhythmic energy (“a triumph of Bacchic fury,” in the words of the eminent English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey), but did it in such a manner as to exceed the climaxes of the earlier movements and make it the goal toward which they had all been aimed. So intoxicating is this music that some of Beethoven's contemporaries were sure he had composed it in a drunken frenzy. An encounter with the Seventh Symphony is a heady experience. Klaus G. Roy, program annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra, wrote, “Many a listener has come away from a hearing of this Symphony in a state of being punch-drunk. Yet it is an intoxication without a hangover, a dope-like exhilaration without decadence.” To which the composer's own words may be added. “I am Bacchus incarnate,” boasted Beethoven, “appointed to

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give humanity wine to drown its sorrow.... He who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world.”

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