



Program Notes

for kids

Firebird
Saturday, March 18
8:00 p.m.
Michigan Theater

Schachter Freylekhe Tanzen
Grieg Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16

Intermission

Debussy Nocturnes
Stravinsky Firebird Suite

Freylekhe Tanzen

by Michael Schachter

About the Music

When was it written?

Freylekhe Tanzen was composed between October and December 2011 as a requirement for Schachter's Master's degree in Composition at the University of Michigan.

What is it about?

Freylekhe Tanzen is inspired by traditional Eastern European Jewish folk music called *Klezmer*. The title means "joyous dances" in Yiddish. The first half of the piece centers on a slow dance style known as a *Zhok*, and the second half of the piece is a *Freylekh*, a lively Klezmer dance style.



Michael Schachter

About the Composer

Michael Schachter | Born in 1987 in Boston, Massachusetts | Lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan

Family & Career

Born and raised in Massachusetts, Michael Schachter earned his undergraduate degree in composition from Harvard in 2009, and then spent a year in Chennai, India, studying South Indian classical music. Michael is currently studying Music Theory and Composition at the University of Michigan.

Listen for...

The loud calls from the brass section. These instruments mimic the Shofar, a Jewish instrument made out of a ram's horn.

The clarinet is an important Klezmer instrument. Listen for the sliding clarinet solos.

Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16

by Edvard Grieg

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

A *concerto* is a piece of music written for a solo instrument with an orchestra. In this case, the pianist is the soloist, so he sits at the front of the stage and plays the most important part. In a concerto, the soloist and orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloist could play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloist, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos usually have three *movements*, or sections.

When was it written?

Grieg wrote his only *Piano Concerto* in 1868, shortly after the birth of his daughter.

About the Composer

Edvard Grieg | Born June 15, 1843 in Bergen, Norway | Died September 4, 1907 in Bergen, Norway

Family & Career

Grieg was born into a large, wealthy family. He had four siblings, and his mother played piano. Grieg absolutely loved the piano, learning how to play by the age of 6. He sat for hours playing melodies he had heard and creating his own. At age 15 Grieg went to study piano and composition at the Leipzig Conservatory in Germany.

Grieg married his cousin Nina Hagerup. They had one child, a daughter named Alexandria, who died two years later from meningitis.

Music

Grieg is a national icon of Norway, like George Washington in the United States or William Shakespeare in England. Drawing inspiration from his country, Grieg used Norwegian folk music in his compositions. Through his works, he brought Norway onto the international music scene.

He is most known for his *Piano Concerto* and music for the Norwegian play *Peer Gynt*, which includes the famous piece *In the Hall of the Mountain King*.



Nocturne in Blue and Silver by James McNeill Whistler

Nocturnes

by Claude Debussy

About the Music

When was it written?

Debussy finished *Nocturnes* on December 15, 1899 and it was first performed in 1901.

What is it about?

Debussy loved writing music inspired by artwork and poems. *Nocturnes* is inspired by the paintings of American artist James McNeill Whistler. This piece has three movements: *Nuages* (clouds), *Fêtes* (parties), and *Sirènes* (sirens). *Nuages* represents a slow moving, solemn gray sky full of clouds streaked with white. *Fêtes* evokes the vibrating, dancing rhythm of a party. And *Sirènes* represents the sounds of the sea and the mysterious song of the Sirens, beautiful but dangerous sea creatures, as they sing and laugh in the moonlight.

About the Composer

Claude Debussy | Born August 22, 1862 in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France | Died March 25, 1918 in Paris, France

Family & Career

Debussy was born in a suburb of Paris, the oldest of five children in a poor family. While staying with his Aunt in southern France, he started piano lessons at the age of seven. He was accepted into the Paris Conservatory at the age of ten to study piano and composition.

Debussy was a very creative and original composer, and disliked the strict rules of the composition classes at the Conservatory. He preferred improvisation and “weird” harmonies and scales. Throughout his career he wrote pieces outside the mainstream, which confused and fascinated listeners, and even offended some people. During his lifetime his pieces were often disliked, and he only gained real recognition after his death.

Music

Debussy is a famous *impressionist* composer. *Impressionism* is a style of painting that captures the immediate impression of a scene instead of depicting exactly what it looks like in reality. Claude Monet is the most famous impressionist painter. Many people think that Debussy's dreamy and hazy music sounds like how Monet's paintings look.

Firebird Suite

by Igor Stravinsky

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

This is a *suite*: a set of short instrumental or orchestral pieces performed on a concert. The *Firebird Suite* is a series of pieces taken from Stravinsky's ballet of the same name.

When was it written?

Firebird was written in 1910 for the Russian Ballet. It was first performed in Paris and was an instant hit.



The Firebird and Prince Ivan

What is it about?

Firebird tells the story of Prince Ivan's quest to win the heart of the princess Tsarevna. But first, he must defeat the evil magician Kostcheï. Prince Ivan meets the Firebird in an enchanted forest, and she gives him one of her feathers. She says that it will help him if he is ever in trouble. The Prince then finds twelve beautiful women outside Kostcheï's castle, including the Tsarevna. The Prince follows the women inside, where he is confronted by Kostcheï. After waving the feather, the Firebird appears and chases the magician away. The Firebird then leads Prince Ivan to a hidden egg containing Kostcheï's soul. The Prince breaks the egg, lifting the enchantment on the forest and the women. Prince Ivan and Tsarevna fall in love and get married, living happily ever after.

About the Composer

Igor Stravinsky | Born June 17, 1882 in Saint Petersburg, Russia | Died April 6, 1971 in New York City, New York

Family & Career

Stravinsky grew up in the lively city of St. Petersburg in a very musical family. He took piano lessons as a boy, studying music theory and trying out composition. But despite his passion and talent for music, he studied Law in college. It was obvious that Stravinsky's heart wasn't in it; he barely went to class and composed whenever he had free time. Stravinsky eventually decided to return to music. He went on to become one of the most famous composers of the 20th century, composing for ballet, opera, and orchestra.

Stravinsky lived in many places. After leaving Russia during World War I, he moved to France, and then later to the United States where he lived in Los Angeles and New York City.



Woman with a Parasol by Claude Monet