

Season 2017-2018

Thursday, April 19, at 7:30

Friday, April 20, at 8:00

Saturday, April 21, at 8:00

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Stéphane Denève Conductor

Vadim Repin Violin

Connesson *Flammenschrift*

First Philadelphia Orchestra performances

Prokofiev Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19

I. Andantino—Andante assai

II. Scherzo: Vivacissimo

III. Moderato

Intermission

Strauss *Death and Transfiguration*, Op. 24

Ravel *La Valse*

This program runs approximately 1 hour, 40 minutes.

The April 19 concert is sponsored by the

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The April 21 concert is also sponsored by

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The Philadelphia Orchestra

Jeffrey Griffin



The Philadelphia Orchestra is one of the preeminent orchestras in the world, renowned for its distinctive sound, desired for its keen ability to capture the hearts and imaginations of audiences, and admired for a legacy of imagination and innovation on and off the concert stage. The Orchestra is inspiring the future and transforming its rich tradition of achievement, sustaining the highest level of artistic quality, but also challenging—and exceeding—that level, by creating powerful musical experiences for audiences at home and around the world.

Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin's connection to the Orchestra's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics since his inaugural season in 2012. Under his leadership the Orchestra returned to recording, with three celebrated CDs on the prestigious Deutsche Grammophon label, continuing its history of recording success. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of listeners on the radio with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM.

Philadelphia is home and the Orchestra continues to discover new and inventive ways to nurture its relationship with its loyal patrons at its home in the Kimmel Center, and also with those who enjoy the Orchestra's area performances at the Mann Center, Penn's Landing, and other cultural, civic, and learning venues. The Orchestra maintains a strong commitment to collaborations with cultural and community organizations on a regional and national level, all of which create greater access and engagement with classical music as an art form.

The Philadelphia Orchestra serves as a catalyst for cultural activity across Philadelphia's many communities, building an offstage presence as strong as its onstage one. With Nézet-Séguin, a dedicated body of musicians, and one of the nation's richest arts ecosystems, the Orchestra has launched its **HEAR** initiative, a portfolio of integrated initiatives that promotes **H**ealth, champions music **E**ducation, eliminates barriers to **A**ccessing the orchestra, and maximizes

impact through **R**esearch. The Orchestra's award-winning Collaborative Learning programs engage over 50,000 students, families, and community members through programs such as Play!Ns, side-by-sides, PopUP concerts, free Neighborhood Concerts, School Concerts, and residency work in Philadelphia and abroad.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, presentations, and recordings, The Philadelphia Orchestra is a global ambassador for Philadelphia and for the US. Having been the first American orchestra to perform in China, in 1973 at the request of President Nixon, the ensemble today boasts new five-year partnerships with Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts and the Shanghai Media Group. In 2018 the Orchestra travels to Europe and Israel. The Orchestra annually performs at Carnegie Hall while also enjoying summer residencies in Saratoga Springs, NY, and Vail, CO. For more information on The Philadelphia Orchestra, please visit www.philorch.org.

Principal Guest Conductor



Jessica Griffin

Stéphane Denève recently extended his contract as principal guest conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra through the 2019-20 season. He spends multiple weeks each year with the ensemble, conducting subscription, Family, tour, and summer concerts. His 2017-18 subscription season appearances include four weeks of concerts, with a special focus on the music of Guillaume Connesson; two Family concerts; and the Orchestra's annual New Year's Eve concert. Mr. Denève has led more programs with the Orchestra than any other guest conductor since making his debut in 2007, in repertoire that has spanned more than 100 works, ranging from Classical through the contemporary, including presentations with dance, theater, film, and cirque performers. Mr. Denève is also music director of the Brussels Philharmonic and director of its Centre for Future Orchestral Repertoire, and music director designate of the St. Louis Symphony. From 2011 to 2016 he was chief conductor of the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra and from 2005 to 2012 music director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Recent engagements in Europe and Asia include appearances with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Vienna and NHK symphonies, the Munich and Czech philharmonics, and the Orchestre National de France. In North America he made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2012 with the Boston Symphony, with which he is a frequent guest. He appears regularly with the Cleveland Orchestra, the New York and Los Angeles philharmonics, and the San Francisco and Toronto symphonies.

Mr. Denève has won critical acclaim for his recordings of the works of Poulenc, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Franck, and Connesson. He is a triple winner of the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, was shortlisted in 2012 for *Gramophone's* Artist of the Year award, and won the prize for symphonic music at the 2013 International Classical Music Awards. A graduate of, and prizewinner at, the Paris Conservatory, Mr. Denève worked closely in his early career with Georg Solti, Georges Prêtre, and Seiji Ozawa. He is committed to inspiring the next generation of musicians and listeners and has worked regularly with young people in the programs of the Tanglewood Music Center and the New World Symphony.

Soloist



Sasha Glasov

Violinist **Vadim Repin** made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in November 1999 performing Prokofiev's First Concerto with Yuri Temirkanov. Born in Novosibirsk, Siberia, in 1971, he was just 11 years old when he won the gold medal in all age categories at the Wieniawski Competition and gave recital debuts in Moscow and St. Petersburg. At age 14 he made debuts in Tokyo, Munich, Berlin, and Helsinki. A year later he debuted at Carnegie Hall. At age 17 he was the youngest-ever winner of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. Since then he has performed with all the world's greatest orchestras and conductors.

In addition to these current concerts, highlights of Mr. Repin's career in the past few seasons include tours with the London Symphony and Valery Gergiev, and the London Philharmonic and Valdimir Jurowski; a tour with the NHK Symphony; and acclaimed premieres in London, Philadelphia, at Carnegie Hall, at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, and at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw of the violin concerto written for him by James MacMillan, culminating in a BBC Proms performance at a sold-out Royal Albert Hall.

Mr. Repin has recorded the violin concertos of the great Russian composers Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Tchaikovsky on Warner Classics. For Deutsche Grammophon he has recorded the Beethoven Concerto with the Vienna Philharmonic and Riccardo Muti; the Brahms Concerto and Double Concerto with cellist Truls Mørk and the Gewandhaus Orchestra led by Riccardo Chailly; the Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff trios with cellist Mischa Maisky and pianist Lang Lang (which won the Echo Classic award); and works by Grieg, Janáček, and Franck with pianist Nikolai Lugansky, which won the 2011 BBC Music Award.

In 2010 Mr. Repin received the Victoire d'Honneur, France's most prestigious musical award, for a lifetime's dedication to music, and became Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres. Following master classes and concerts in Beijing in December 2014 he was awarded an honorary professorship at the Central Conservatory of Music and, in 2015, an honorary professorship at the Shanghai Conservatory. Mr. Repin plays the 1733 "Rode" Stradivarius violin.

Framing the Program

Parallel Events

1888

Strauss

*Death and
Transfiguration*

Music

Tchaikovsky
Symphony No. 5

Literature

Zola
La Terre

Art

Van Gogh
The Yellow Chair

History

Eastman
perfects "Kodak"
box camera

1917

Prokofiev

Violin Concerto
No. 1

Music

Respighi
*Fountains of
Rome*

Literature

Eliot
*Prufrock
and Other
Observations*

Art

Modigliani
*Crouching
Female Nude*

History

U.S. enters
World War I

1919

Ravel

La Valse

Music

Elgar
Cello Concerto

Literature

Hesse
Demian

Art

Klee
Dream Birds

History

Treaty of
Versailles

Over the course of this season Principal Guest Conductor Stéphane Denève is leading The Philadelphia Orchestra in three works composed by his fellow Frenchman Guillaume

Connesson that were inspired by different countries. *Maslenitsa*, the Russian piece, was presented in October. This concert offers *Flammenschrift* (Fire Letter), honoring German culture and music, most notably Beethoven. Next week features the Italian portion of the trilogy: *E chiaro nella valle il fiume appare* (And the River Shimmers in the Valley).

Sergei Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1 is one of the last works he composed in his native Russia before leaving in the wake of the 1917 October Revolution. He had to wait more than six years for its premiere, which took place in Paris. While some critics, having already grown accustomed to more modernist shocks, initially found the piece too tame, its lyrical beauty and brilliant middle-movement scherzo have captivated audiences from the start.

Richard Strauss composed his magnificent tone poem *Death and Transfiguration* in his mid-20s. What he imagined about the end of life at that young age formed a vision he would return to nearly 60 years later when his own life was drawing to its close.

"I feel this work as a kind of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, linked in my mind with the impression of a fantastic whirl of destiny." So Maurice Ravel said of *La Valse*, which he composed in the wake of the First World War, after a period of military service, poor health, creative inactivity, and his mother's death. The brilliantly orchestrated work begins mysteriously as a haunted waltz and builds through various thrilling climaxes to a cataclysmic conclusion.

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only American orchestra with weekly broadcasts on Sirius XM's *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, made possible through support from the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation on behalf of David and Sandy Marshall. Broadcasts are heard on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

The Music

Flammenschrift



Guillaume Connesson
**Born in Boulogne-
Billancourt, May 5, 1970**
Now living in Paris

The French composer Guillaume Connesson is young enough to still be considered “postmodern” without having to labor under the philosophical and aesthetic weight of being a “postmodernist.” Like many of his generation, he has simply felt at liberty to draw on and juxtapose a wide variety of musical sources without any compulsion to react overtly against the modernism that, by many accounts, was already fading before he was even born. He cites, without a hint of irony, such diverse influences as Couperin, Wagner, Messiaen, Stravinsky, John Williams, and James Brown. His music can shift seamlessly between historical reference, contemporary and avant-garde techniques, and the sounds of popular music genres such as disco, techno, and jazz (especially early in his career). But Connesson avoids the “blank parody” of much postmodernism, showing reverence and great affection for both past and present in these wide-ranging musical allusions.

Connesson studied music in Boulogne and Paris before embarking on a career in composition that has led him to residencies with the Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire, the Orchestre de Pau Pays de Béarn, and the Orchestre National de Lyon. He has worked on major commissions for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In addition to a large collection of major orchestral works, Connesson composes extensively for voice and choirs, with a growing group of chamber works rounding out his corpus. He currently serves as professor of orchestration at the Conservatoire National de Région d'Aubervilliers and in 2018 concludes a composition residency with the Netherlands Philharmonic.

A Musical Trilogy In 2012 Connesson completed two symphonic poems for orchestra: *Maslenitsa* (performed by the Philadelphians last October) pays homage to the culture and music of Russia, and *Flammenschrift* was conceived as a tribute to Beethoven and Germany. A few years later, when he received another commission for an orchestral work, he decided to turn these three works into a symphonic trilogy, with each movement dedicated to a country with which he has personal, extra-musical ties. He completed the “Italian” portion of the trilogy, *E chiaro nella*

Flammenschrift was composed in 2012.

These are the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the work.

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

Performance time is approximately nine minutes.

valle il fiume appare (And the River Shimmers in the Valley, performed by the Orchestra next week) in 2015.

Though primarily influenced by the composer's personal attachments to each country and its culture, this trilogy naturally incorporates musical influences, as well. In the case of *Flammenschrift* this was in fact a part of the original commission. The conductor Daniele Gatti asked Connesson (along with some other contemporary composers) to provide companion pieces for a Beethoven cycle to be performed by the Orchestre National de France. Connesson planned to pay homage to Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in a work that would also function as a "psychological portrait" of the great master. As this symphonic poem also took on the role of a tribute to Germany in general, the piece accumulated references (near the end) to Brahms and Richard Strauss.

A Closer Look The title *Flammenschrift*, which translates loosely as "flame-writing" or "letter of fire," comes from a passage in Goethe's *Marienbad Elegy* where it characterizes deep, intense passion. Connesson hoped to paint a paradoxical musical portrait of Beethoven, "a man of great anger, seething and impetuous ... a solitary figure cursed by fate yet sanctified by genius," who could be brutal with close friends and associates but who also celebrated ideals of brotherhood and peace in his music. *Flammenschrift* uses essentially the same instrumentation as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and makes direct allusion to the rhythmic, formal, and developmental traits of Beethoven's musical style as well.

The work opens with two violent, propulsive themes that swirl around the orchestra. A third theme, featuring clarinets and bassoons, is somewhat more relaxed, though played over a nervous, restless string accompaniment. A fourth, more lyrical theme rounds out the exposition. Then an extended development section, very much in the Beethovenian tradition, fragments and transforms the principal ideas using a musical vocabulary and grammar that is almost entirely that of the 19th century. Beethoven-like modulations and motivic transformations characterize this dramatic section. Even the master's fascination with fugue is cited before the main themes are transformed one last time. At the climax, the pace quickens and the harmonies break suddenly into the major mode—an overt reference to the finale of the Fifth Symphony—for a conclusive, fiery "dance of joy."

—Luke Howard

The Music

Violin Concerto No. 1



Sergei Prokofiev
Born in Sontsovka,
Ukraine, April 23, 1891
Died in Moscow, March 5,
1953

No doubt it proved frustrating for Sergei Prokofiev, the savvy *enfant terrible* of pre-Revolutionary Russia, to find himself not quite *terrible* enough when his Violin Concerto No. 1 premiered in Paris in 1923. Prokofiev had enjoyed a pampered childhood molded by parents eager to cultivate his obvious musical gifts. By the age of 10 he was already writing an opera and was sent to study at the St. Petersburg Conservatory with leading composers of the day. His early works were often viewed as modernist and challenging.

Like other prominent Russian composers from similarly privileged backgrounds, notably Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev left his homeland after the 1917 October Revolution. He took a few manuscripts with him—including that of the Violin Concerto—and made the long trek through Siberia, stopping off in Tokyo, and finally arriving in New York City in early September 1918. He lived in America, Paris, and other Western cities for nearly 20 years before returning permanently to what was now the Soviet Union.

Challenging in Russia: Tame in Paris The First Violin Concerto was one of the last works Prokofiev composed in Russia. He had initially conceived of it in 1915 as a modest concertino but expanded the piece to a full, although still relatively brief, three-movement concerto when he began serious work in the summer of 1917. This was a particularly prolific time for Prokofiev and composition of the Concerto overlapped with that of his First Symphony, the “Classical.”

The Concerto remained unperformed for more than six years until Prokofiev settled in Paris, when shortly thereafter it was taken up by another Russian expatriate in what proved to be Prokofiev’s first big event in the City of Light. Serge Koussevitzky conducted the premiere at a concert on October 18, 1923, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The soloist was the orchestra’s 18-year-old concertmaster, Marcel Darrieux, who was hardly a star attraction but whose career was helped by the exposure. Prokofiev’s original intention had been for the celebrated Polish violinist Paweł Kochański to premiere it with Alexander Siloti in St. Petersburg, a plan thwarted by the Revolution. (Kochański nonetheless proved helpful crafting the solo violin part.)

The Paris concert, which also featured Stravinsky conducting the premiere of his Octet, was attended by prominent figures, including Picasso, the pianist Artur Schnabel, and the violinist Joseph Szigeti. While many received the work warmly, the critics, much to Prokofiev's disappointment, were generally unenthusiastic. The principal complaint was that the tuneful piece was not modern enough to suit current Parisian tastes. Composer Georges Auric complained of the work's "Mendelssohnisms." Prokofiev himself soon expressed reservations in a letter: "I don't especially like a lot of it although I am happy enough with the second movement. But the first movement and the finale were conceived in 1913 [!] and executed in 1916 and now, to be sure, I would do a lot of it very differently. It is so unpleasant when you write something and it waits several years for the favor of a performance!" For some time following, Prokofiev embraced a tougher modernist style, with limited success, before changing again to a "new simplicity" when he returned permanently to Russia in 1936.

If the reaction in Paris was mixed, the lyrical qualities of the Concerto were immediately embraced in Russia, where the first performance was given three days after the Paris premiere, with piano rather than orchestra, by two formidable teenagers: Nathan Milstein and Vladimir Horowitz. Szigeti, who had been impressed by the Paris concert, became the great international champion of the Concerto. He was the one who gave the Russian orchestral premiere and his performance at a new music festival in Prague, with Fritz Reiner conducting, marked a turning point in the work's international fortunes. Szigeti and Reiner also gave the first performance of the Concerto with The Philadelphia Orchestra in 1927.

A Closer Look Prokofiev's remarkable melodic gifts are apparent from the beginning of the first movement (**Andantino**), when a long lyrical theme, to be played "dreamily," is stated by the soloist over an unassuming tremolo in the violas—a shimmering effect that owes a debt to Sibelius's Violin Concerto. Matters become more playful as the movement progresses, but the plaintive, dreamlike character returns at the end. The sparkling second movement (**Vivacissimo**) is a brief and brilliant scherzo highlighting the composer's affinity for the grotesque and satiric. Prokofiev said in his diary that he planned "to make it the scherzo of all scherzos." In this most modern movement of the piece, the soloist dispatches an array of violin techniques, including harmonics, pizzicatos, and unusual

Prokofiev composed his First Violin Concerto from 1915 to 1917.

Joseph Szigeti was the soloist in the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the Concerto, in November 1927; the conductor was Fritz Reiner. Most recently, the work was performed in November 2016 by Benjamin Beilman, with Yannick Nézet-Séguin on the podium.

The Orchestra's only recording of the work was made with Eugene Ormandy in 1963 for CBS with Isaac Stern as soloist.

The First Violin Concerto is scored for two flutes (fl doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, tambourine), harp, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.

The piece runs approximately 22 minutes in performance.

bowings. Lyricism returns for the finale (**Moderato**) but this time the music initially has a mechanical underpinning that in due course yields to the mysteriousness of the first movement and a return of the opening theme of the Concerto in the coda.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

The Music

Death and Transfiguration



Richard Strauss
Born in Munich, June 11,
1864
Died in Garmisch-
Partenkirchen,
September 8, 1949

Strauss did not invent the orchestral tone poem—that distinction goes to Franz Liszt, who as early as the 1840s composed works he called “symphonic poems”—but he brought to this unusual genre such technical brilliance and philosophical aplomb that today he is often thought of as its founder. Coming directly on the heels of his first tone poem, namely the brilliant and highly successful *Don Juan*, the ambitious companion-piece he called *Tod und Verklärung* (Death and Transfiguration) treated death with all the wonder and grave fascination that one would expect of a 25 year old, and it helped further the 20th-century notion that even purely instrumental music could be made to express the deepest and most complex of philosophical concepts.

An Autobiographical Work? Though *Death and Transfiguration* was mostly complete by the time of *Don Juan*'s premiere in Weimar in November 1889, it was not performed until June 1890, in Eisenach, with the composer conducting. The assertion of the early biographer Richard Specht that it was autobiographical—in the sense that it depicted some delirious illness of the composer—was based partly on a misunderstanding of the work's chronology. Strauss did indeed fall ill, but not until nearly two years after he completed this piece. Yet it may not be wrong to place the composer in the role of the “hero” of this work, in the same sense in which *Don Juan* and *Ein Heldenleben* contain personal references.

Strauss recovered from his illness, in fact—neither dead nor, presumably, transfigured—and went on to live another 60 years. Nevertheless he continued to treat the subjects of death and the afterlife again and again in his music—most notably in *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Ein Heldenleben*, and even to some extent in the more comic *Don Juan*, *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, and *Don Quixote*, not to mention in his operas.

A Closer Look Still, *Death and Transfiguration* remains a potent statement on the nature of death and dying. It began with an idea, which the composer's friend Alexander Ritter formed into a brief poem that outlined the “program.” This poem was later expanded into the 62-line verse that was printed in the first edition of the score. In 1894 Strauss

Death and Transfiguration was composed from 1888 to 1889.

Strauss himself conducted The Philadelphia Orchestra's first performances of the work, in March 1904, in a series of concerts that also featured the appearance of his wife, Pauline de Ahna Strauss, in songs by her husband. The Orchestra's most recent subscription performance of the work was led by Cristian Măcelaru, in April 2013.

The Philadelphia Orchestra recorded Death and Transfiguration five times: in 1934 for RCA with Leopold Stokowski; in 1942 for RCA with Arturo Toscanini; in 1944 and 1959 for CBS with Eugene Ormandy; and in 1978 for RCA with Ormandy. A live performance from November 2006 with Neeme Järvi is also currently available as a digital download.

Strauss's score calls for an orchestra of three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (tam-tam), two harps, and strings.

The work runs approximately 24 minutes in performance.

summarized the essence of the verse in a letter—where some of the work's autobiographical elements can be detected:

Six years ago it occurred to me to present, in the form of a tone poem, the dying hours of a man who had striven towards the highest idealistic aims, maybe indeed those of an artist. The sick man lies in bed, asleep, with heavy irregular breathing; friendly dreams conjure a smile on the features of the deeply suffering man; he wakes up; he is once more racked with horrible agonies; his limbs shake with fever.

As the attack passes and the pains leave off, his thoughts wander through his past life; his childhood passes before him, the time of his youth with its strivings and passions and then, as the pains already begin to return, there appears to him the fruit of his life's path, the conception, the ideal which he has sought to realize, to present artistically, but which he had not been able to complete, since it is not for man to be able to accomplish such things. The hour of death approaches, the soul leaves the body in order to find gloriously achieved in everlasting space those things which could not be fulfilled here below.

All of this is depicted through specific programmatic elements. The work begins with atmospheric music representing the sick and suffering man, whose heartbeat is an irregular pulse heard alternately in the strings and timpani at the outset. Several contrasting themes depict various aspects of the man's character and progress, and a bright, yearning descent in the solo oboe is sounded as he thinks back upon his youth.

But suddenly his violent agony returns with an explosive pang, as expressed through music that is at once agitated and contrapuntal, and is then overcome in a resolute tutti theme of triumph. The road to transcendence is the famous ascending subject representing the hero's ideological transfiguration; it is this tune that returns several times to represent stages in the hero's achievement of truth. (Many years later, it would show up in the valedictory strains of "Im Abendrot" from the composer's *Four Last Songs*.)

The central section, a development of sorts, features a series of resolutions and hopes, climaxing in a soaring ascent that nearly overcomes the man's sickened heart. Each climax results in a restatement of the "ideology" theme, until death's inevitability approaches, and the hero achieves transcendence in a luminous blaze of C major.

—Paul J. Horsley

The Music

La Valse



Maurice Ravel
Born in Ciboure, France,
March 7, 1875
Died in Paris, December 28,
1937

What could be more harmless than a nice waltz? Well, it depends on the circumstances. Maurice Ravel composed *La Valse* in the wake of the First World War, after a period of military service, poor health, compositional inactivity, and the death of his beloved mother. Ideas for the work dated back to 1906, when he initially planned to call it *Wien* (Vienna), an homage to the music of the “Waltz King,” Johann Strauss II.

Ravel abandoned that project, although he used some of the ideas a few years later in *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911), originally written for piano and then orchestrated for a ballet production. The work was an early attempt by Ravel to imitate a past musical style, in this instance inspired by Schubert. There followed another set of piano pieces (some of which Ravel later orchestrated) that looked to an even more distant past, to the French Baroque period. Ravel composed *Le Tombeau de Couperin* during World War I and dedicated each of the movements to a friend or colleague who had died in battle.

“The Apotheosis of the Viennese Waltz” In 1919 Ravel returned to his earlier Vienna project when the great impresario Sergei Diaghilev, for whom he had composed *Daphnis and Chloé* (1912), expressed interest in a new piece for his legendary Ballets Russes. Ravel played through *La Valse* for him in a keyboard version. Igor Stravinsky and Francis Poulenc were present and, according to the latter, Diaghilev responded “Ravel, it is a masterpiece . . . but it’s not a ballet. It’s a portrait of a ballet . . . a painting of a ballet.” The composer was deeply offended and the incident caused a permanent breach between the two.

As with some of his earlier orchestral works, Ravel composed versions of *La Valse* for solo piano as well as for two pianos. (He also orchestrated piano music of Debussy, Satie, Chopin, Schumann, and, most famously, Musorgsky’s *Pictures from an Exhibition*.) In October 1920, together with the Italian composer Alfredo Casella, Ravel presented the premiere of the work in the two-piano version in Vienna at a special concert given by Arnold Schoenberg’s Society for Private Musical Performances. The first orchestral performance took place in Paris seven weeks later. As a work originally planned as a ballet, and that carries the subtitle “choreographic

La Valse was composed from 1919 to 1920.

Leopold Stokowski conducted the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of La Valse, in October 1922. Most recently on subscription, it was led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin in January 2013.

The Orchestra has recorded La Valse three times, all with Eugene Ormandy: in 1953 and 1963 for CBS, and in 1971 for RCA.

The work is scored for three flutes (III doubling piccolo), three oboes (III doubling English horn), two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, castanets, crotales, cymbals, orchestra bells, snare drum, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle), two harps, and strings.

Performance time is approximately 15 minutes.

poem," Ravel was eager to have it staged, especially after Diaghilev's rejection. The first choreographed version was presented in Antwerp with the Royal Flemish Ballet in 1926 and two years later Ida Rubinstein danced it in Paris. Noted choreographers, including George Balanchine and Frederick Ashton, have used the music as well.

A Closer Look In an autobiographical sketch Ravel stated what he had in mind when he wrote *La Valse*: "Eddying clouds allow glimpses of waltzing couples. The clouds gradually disperse, revealing a vast hall filled with a whirling throng. The scene grows progressively brighter. The light of chandeliers blazes out: an imperial court around 1855." Elsewhere he remarked that he "conceived this work as a sort of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz, mingled with, in my mind, the impression of a fantastic, fatal whirling."

Others have heard the piece more as apocalypse than apotheosis. The distinguished historian Carl Schorske opened his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (1980) stating that *La Valse* is a celebration of "the destruction of the world of the waltz," which would be understandable after the war, as would Ravel's decision to change the title. Ravel, however, resisted those who saw in it the destructive and sinister, saying in an interview that the work

doesn't have anything to do with the present situation in Vienna, and it also doesn't have any symbolic meaning in that regard. In the course of *La Valse*, I did not envision a dance of death or a struggle between life and death. (The year of the choreographic argument, 1855, repudiates such an assumption.) I changed the original title "Wien" to *La Valse*, which is more in keeping with the aesthetic nature of the composition. It is a dancing, whirling, almost hallucinatory ecstasy, an increasingly passionate and exhausting whirlwind of dancers, who are overcome and exhilarated by nothing but "the waltz."

The mysterious opening (in the tempo of a "Viennese waltz") unfolds as if one is entering a party already in progress, with fragments of melodies gradually coalescing. The piece unfolds, as many of Strauss's did, as a series of waltzes, but with an unusually wide range of moods, including the charming, sinister, and ecstatic.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

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Musical Terms

GENERAL TERMS

Cadenza: A passage or section in a style of brilliant improvisation, usually inserted near the end of a movement or composition

Chord: The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

Coda: A concluding section or passage added in order to confirm the impression of finality

Concertino: A composition resembling a concerto, but in free form and usually in one movement with contrasting sections

Contrapuntal: See counterpoint

Counterpoint: A term that describes the combination of simultaneously sounding musical lines

Development: See sonata form

Exposition: See sonata form

Fugue: A piece of music in which a short melody is stated by one voice and then imitated by the other voices in succession, reappearing throughout the entire piece in all the voices at different places

Harmonics: High notes that are achieved on instruments of the violin family when the performer lightly places his finger exactly in the middle of the

vibrating string

Meter: The symmetrical grouping of musical rhythms

Modernism: A consequence of the fundamental conviction among successive generations of composers since 1900 that the means of musical expression in the 20th century must be adequate to the unique and radical character of the age

Op.: Abbreviation for opus, a term used to indicate the chronological position of a composition within a composer's output. Opus numbers are not always reliable because they are often applied in the order of publication rather than composition.

Pizzicato: Plucked

Recapitulation: See sonata form

Scherzo: Literally "a joke." Usually the third movement of symphonies and quartets that was introduced by Beethoven to replace the minuet. The scherzo is followed by a gentler section called a trio, after which the scherzo is repeated. Its characteristics are a rapid tempo in triple time, vigorous rhythm, and humorous contrasts. Also an instrumental piece of a light, piquant, humorous character.

Sonata form: The form in

which the first movements (and sometimes others) of symphonies are usually cast. The sections are exposition, development, and recapitulation, the last sometimes followed by a coda. The exposition is the introduction of the musical ideas, which are then "developed." In the recapitulation, the exposition is repeated with modifications.

Symphonic poem:

A type of 19th-century symphonic piece in one movement, which is based upon an extramusical idea, either poetic or descriptive

Tone poem: See symphonic poem

Tremolo: In bowing, repeating the note very fast with the point of the bow

Tutti: All; full orchestra

THE SPEED OF MUSIC (Tempo)

Andante: Walking speed

Andantino: Slightly quicker than walking speed

Moderato: A moderate tempo, neither fast nor slow

Vivacissimo: Very lively

TEMPO MODIFIERS

Assai: Much

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