

Brevard Symphony Orchestra (2011-12) Subscription Series 1:

Notes provided by: David R. Glerum, Music Director – WMFE-FM/NPR, Orlando, FL. (1990-2009); Music Director – WXXI-FM/NPR, Rochester, N.Y. (1980-1990)

John Corigliano (b. 1938) – Promenade Overture:

John Corigliano is one of the finest and most widely recognized American composers. Among the dozens of citations, doctorates, and other honors he has received are included all of the most important music awards — several Grammys, a Pulitzer Prize for his Symphony No. 2 (2001), a Grawemeyer for his Symphony No. 1 (1991), and an Academy Award for his score to Francois Girard's 1997 film *The Red Violin*. Corigliano serves on the faculty at the Juilliard School of Music, and holds the position of Distinguished Professor of Music at Lehman College, City University of New York, which recently established a composition scholarship in his name. He lives in New York City and in Kent Cliffs, New York.

What sets Corigliano apart from some of his contemporaries is an unabashed and unapologetic approach to writing music that is accessible, deeply moving, melodic, tonal, and immediately pleasing to audiences. The composer explains his aesthetic this way: "I care deeply about communicating with my audiences... For quite a while now, too many composers have seemed not much interested in communication, particularly with big audiences, and this has tended to give modern music a bad name... There is just no reason why a composer shouldn't be able to reach large audiences in a worthwhile way, even if he uses advanced techniques... I wish to be understood, and I think it is the job of every composer to reach out to his audience with all the means at his disposal. Communication should always be a primary goal."

The composer – John Corigliano – provides the following notes for his *Promenade Overture*: "The premise of this work took root years ago when I was caught off guard by Haydn's delightful *Farewell Symphony*. This Haydn work is often used to end a concert because during the last movement the players gradually exit, leaving two violins to finish the symphony on a bare stage. Since overtures usually begin concerts, a reverse of this procedure – the entrance of an orchestra while playing – became both an interesting idea and a compositional challenge. Offstage brass announce the start of the *Promenade Overture*, with the trumpets playing the last five measures of the *Farewell Symphony* – backwards. This forms a fanfare announcing the promenade of performers, which starts with the piccolo, concludes with the tuba, and contains a variety of motives which eventually form a lyrical melody that is built to a climax by the full orchestra."

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) – Carnival of the Animals:

A composer, pianist and organist, in addition to being erudite in other fields (including archaeology, botany, occult sciences, poetry, and, lest we forget, lepidoptery), Saint-Saëns was one of the most significant French cultural figures of the 19th century. His long life and music career encompassed the Romantic era and its transition into the modern age. His style was admired for its technical fluency, clarity of form, elegance and refinement. Although best known for his *Organ*

Symphony and *The Carnival of the Animals*, Saint-Saëns's output was vast and versatile, including symphonies, concertos, organ music, operas, secular and sacred vocal music, songs, and chamber works for often unusual combinations of instruments. Music flowed from Saint-Saëns effortlessly; so much so that he claimed to have churned out musical compositions "as an apple tree produces apples." Across all genres, Saint-Saëns remained consistent in his musical philosophy: "The artist who does not feel completely satisfied by elegant lines, by harmonious colors, and by a beautiful succession of chords does not understand the art of music."

Considering that *Carnival of the Animals* has become Saint-Saëns's most popular composition, it is ironic that in his lifetime the composer absolutely forbade its publication or performance. It is thanks only to a late revision of his will that the suite became cleared for performance after his death (the public premiere took place in Paris just two months after his passing). Saint-Saëns's obstinacy stemmed from his perception that *Carnival* would have immediate audience appeal and so would possibly eclipse the appreciation he coveted for his more serious efforts, e.g., his concertos, symphonies, and operas. Besides, *Carnival* was only written as an amusement and on capricious whim. Saint-Saëns was something of a "social animal" and enjoyed the active social life of Paris. He was well known as a magnet for fellow artists and loved to spend time with *La Trompette*, a cultural society that threw informal and fun-oriented concerts for and involving its members and guests. It was for the society's annual Mardi Gras concert – held in March of 1886 – that Saint-Saëns wrote what he thought of as only a private joke. But what began life as a diversion intended just for friends wound up becoming the composer's signature work. Three quarters of a century later *Carnival* continues to enchant audiences with its magical blend of fun, satire, beauty, and picturesque orchestration.

Humorously described by the composer as "a grand zoological fantasy for orchestra," *Carnival of the Animals* takes us on a tour of the animal kingdom through a series of colorful and often witty vignettes. But often underneath these various animal portraits, Saint-Saëns pokes good-natured fun at the faults and quirks of mankind itself.

- ***Introduction and Royal March of the Lion.***

- ***Hens and Roosters.***

- ***Wild Jackasses.*** Satirizes those annoying pianists who place technique above musicianship.

- ***Tortoises.*** A hilarious setting of two melodies from Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* – including the can-can – slowed down incongruously to...a tortoise's...pace.

- ***The Elephant.*** Hector Berlioz's *Dance of the Sylphs* played on the double bass? Listen carefully and you will also catch a glimpse of Felix Mendelssohn's Scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

- ***Kangaroos.*** The marsupials blithely hop from one piano to the other and a mocking commentary is given on audiences who talk through concert performances. Be sure to be very quiet here!

- ***Aquarium***. In the midst of the buffoonery, a dreamy and placid repose. You may recognize this from the *Impressions de France* film at Epcot Center's French Pavilion.
- ***Characters with Long Ears***.
- ***The Cuckoo in the Depths of the Woods***.
- ***Aviary***.
- ***Pianists***. Pianists are given full membership status in the animal kingdom and are seemingly placed at or near the very bottom of the food chain. The budding young pianist's endless scales, modulations, wrong notes, and restarts are satirized with a wink and a smile.
- ***Fossils***. Several musical relics are parodied. French folk songs including *Ah! Vous dirai-je Maman* (better known in America as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*; the aria "*Una voce poco fa*" from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*; and just to show that he doesn't place himself above a bit of mockery, Saint-Saëns pokes fun at his own *Danse Macabre*.
- ***The Swan***. This is the best known and most often played section of the suite. The cello plays a beautiful and serene melody simulating the graceful and majestic movement of the swan. So admired was this part that it was the only one the composer allowed to be played during his lifetime.
- ***Finale***.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881): *Pictures at an Exhibition (arr. Ravel)*:

Promenade. The Gnome
Promenade. The Old Castle
Promenade. Tuileries
Bydlo
Promenade. Ballet of the Chicks in their Shells
Samuel Goldenburg and Schmuyle
The Marketplace at Limoges
Catacombs, Roman Tombs. Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua
The Hut on Fowl's Legs
The Great Gate of Kiev

Born in 1839 in Karevo, Russia into a family of impoverished Russian nobility, young Modest showed early signs of musical ability and developed into a child prodigy able to tackle piano concertos by the age of nine. Despite such promise, however, Mussorgsky had a minimal amount of musical training and remained an undisciplined composer known for a raw and rough style that would characterize his style throughout his musical life. For economic reasons he prepared for an army career and so was educated at a military cadet school. After graduating he joined the Regiment of Guards when he was nineteen.

Mussorgsky's heart was in music, though, and he started studies with composer Mily Balakirev, enabling him to become exposed to such admired composers as

Beethoven and Schumann through playing four-hand piano reductions of their scores. In addition, Mussorgsky became a member of "The Mighty Five," or "The Russian Five," a group of young composers also including Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Their goal was to use Russian folk elements and subjects in their music. Unlike many great composers who were off and running with a music career at this stage, Mussorgsky instead wrestled with inner demons and began a lifelong battle with alcoholism. Psychologically unstable, in 1858 a personal crisis caused him to resign his commission in the guards. He complained that a bout with depression in 1860 rendered him incapable of sustained concentration. This condition plagued Mussorgsky throughout his life and explains his inability to bring various large scale plans to fruition.

After the serfs were given their freedom in 1861, Mussorgsky moved back to the family estate, where he spent two years trying to put its affairs in order. Eventually financial necessity dictated that he take a job, and so Mussorgsky took employment in the Engineering Department of the Ministry of Communications. He worked there for some four years before getting canned. When his mother died in 1865, Mussorgsky drank even more heavily and developed all the symptoms of chronic alcoholism. He ended up living in the calmer environment of his brother's house in the country. While there he began composing again, writing some exceptional original songs as well as the orchestral piece, *A Night on Bald Mountain*.

A few years later Mussorgsky returned to St. Petersburg and renewed his artistic friendships. To make ends meet he rejoined the civil service as a clerk in the forestry department. But by this time the composer became more serious about his artistic calling and was convinced that it was his duty to portray the life of the Russian people as honestly as possible. In his words: "Life, wherever it is shown; truth, however bitter; speaking out boldly, frankly, point-blank to men – that is my aim...I am a realist in the highest sense – that is, my business is to portray the soul of man in all its profundity." It was out of this strong conviction that in 1868 his greatest triumph was given birth: the Pushkin inspired opera *Boris Gudonov*. It wasn't produced until 1874, but was received enthusiastically and pronounced a masterpiece.

Despite such great success, Mussorgsky had again taken to drinking heavily. The bottle limited his immense potential and eventually led to his demise. Mussorgsky's life was an almost continual struggle against poverty and alcoholism, and as a result his works are almost all marked by a primarily morbid and sometimes savage mood. He died in a St. Petersburg military hospital after an epileptic fit.

In the years around 1850 when Mussorgsky was involved with "The Mighty Five," the composer formed a close friendship with the movement's ally, the artist and architect Victor Hartmann. Hartmann's sudden and premature death at 39 stunned Mussorgsky and the entire Russian artistic community. Vladimir Stassov, respected critic and champion of the Russian arts movement, organized a memorial exhibit of Hartmann's work in February of 1874. Held in St. Petersburg, on display were some 400 of Hartmann's drawings, watercolors, and stage designs. Mussorgsky was deeply moved by the showing and was inspired to write in tribute his *Pictures at an Exhibition*. When he took up the piece the following summer, ideas came flowing out of him: "*Hartmann* is bubbling over, just as *Boris* did," he wrote. "Ideas,

melodies come to me of their own accord, like a banquet of music – I gorge and gorge and overeat myself. I can hardly manage to put them down on paper fast enough.”

Beginning life as an impressive work for piano, *Pictures at an Exhibition* is based on ten of Hartmann’s creations. The breadth of Mussorgsky’s musical imagination is amazing, bringing to life images ranging from playful to eerie to majestic. The composer’s premise is intriguing: a stroll through an art exhibit with each musical setting conveying the mood of a different picture. Mussorgsky makes ingenious use of a *Promenade*, which serves to link his sketches together and to suggest the composer himself shuffling through a gallery and experiencing along the way the wide variety of emotions evoked by Hartmann’s art works.

Pictures at an Exhibition became popular in its original version for piano. But its notoriety increased even more with a spate of orchestrations from the likes of Maurice Ravel, Lucien Caillet, Leopold Stokowski, and many others. Ravel’s orchestration is the one that has emerged as the gold standard. When he was approached by Serge Koussevitzky to fashion a new suit for *Pictures*, Ravel was enthusiastic, having always held Mussorgsky in high esteem for his daring conceptions and bold harmonic strokes. The result – coming almost a half century after the original piano version – was a masterpiece of orchestration remaining true to Ravel’s voice while staying faithful to Mussorgsky. The work received its premiere in Paris under the direction of Serge Koussevitzky on May 3, 1923.

Your tour is as follows:

Promenade. At the beginning, in the words of critic Vladimir Stasov: “The composer here portrays himself walking, now right, now left, now as an idle person, now urged to go near a picture; at times his joyous appearance is dampened, he thinks in sadness of his dead friend.”

The Gnome. Stasov continues that the subject is a “child’s plaything...something in the style of the fabled Nutcracker, the nuts being inserted in the gnome’s mouth. The gnome accompanies his droll movements with savage shrieks.”

Promenade. The Old Castle. Before a medieval Italian castle, a troubadour sings a melancholy song. The saxophone provides the depiction.

Promenade. Tuileries. Set in the famous Paris park, Mussorgsky gave this scene the subtitle, “Dispute of the Children after Play.”

Bydlo. Mussorgsky based this scene on a watercolor showing an old-fashioned Polish oxcart lumbering along as the driver sings a plaintive melody (solo tuba) heard first far-off, then close-by, until the carts rocks off into the distance.

Promenade. Ballet of the Chicks in their Shells. A Hartmann stage design serves as the basis for this vignette. For the ballet *Trilby*, the artist designed egg costumes for a number of boy and girl pupils. The get-ups resembled large eggs, with the dancer’s head, arms, and legs protruding.

Samuel Goldenburg and Schmuyle. This section was inspired by two pictures which Hartmann presented depicting a pair of residents of the Warsaw ghetto: one rich and pompous (strings and winds) and the other

poor and supplicating (muted trumpet). Both themes are based on incantations Mussorgsky had heard on visits to Jewish synagogues.

The Marketplace at Limoges. The scene here is of a bustling and lively market, with animated gossip being tossed back and forth between the female vendors.

Catacombs, Roman Tombs. Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua. Hartmann is led by a friend with a lantern through cavernous Paris catacombs. Following without pause is “With the dead in a dead language.” Mussorgsky wrote on the piano score: “Hartmann’s creative spirit leads us to the place of skulls and calls to them – the skulls begin to glow faintly from within.”

The Hut on Fowl’s Legs. This drawing represents the home of the Russian witch Baba Yaga, a hut in the shape of a giant clock atop a fowl’s legs. Baba Yaga lore has it that she could fly through the air on a fantastic pestle. The music takes us on a whirling and wild midnight-ride.

The Great Gate of Kiev. This awe-inspiring conclusion to Mussorgsky’s suite was inspired by Hartmann’s design for a gateway (never built) to Kiev. The portal is crowned with a cupola in the shape of a Slavic warrior’s helmet. The music is majestic and brings to our imagination the image of a massive edifice and a brilliant procession of medieval nobles entering the ancient capital through its arches. The work ends with a majestic statement of the *Promenade* theme and a jubilant pealing of the city’s great bells.