

Quad City Symphony Orchestra  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
Masterworks V: Echoes of Exploration

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**MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)**  
*Rapsodie Espagnole*

**Instrumentation:** 2 piccolos, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, 2 harps and strings.

**Premiere:** March 15, 1908, Orchestre des Concerts Colonne, Édouard Colonne conducting, Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris.

**QCSO Performance History:** *Rapsodie Espagnole* has been on James Dixon's first regular concert as music director of the Tri-City Symphony in November 1965. He led later performances in 1984 and 1989, the latter of which included a run-out performance in Muscatine. The most recent performances were conducted by Donald Schleicher in October 2001.

Given their overlapping careers and the similarity of their music, French composers Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel are closely linked in the minds of modern

classical audiences. Parallels between their styles, particularly their approaches to orchestration and harmony, are easy to pinpoint, even if their differences are also obvious: unlike Ravel, who loved "antique" forms like the minuet and the rigaudon, Debussy resisted nods to the past. Ravel often employed a bold, immediate style, in contrast to Debussy's generally subtle and often ambiguous expressive approach.

Similarly complicated was the personal relationship between the artists themselves. Both publicly and privately they mixed mutual admiration with subtle criticism. Ravel once claimed that he wished "to die gently lulled in the tender and voluptuous embrace" of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, even if he separately mused that "If I had the time, I would reorchestrate [Debussy's] *La Mer*." In a private letter, Debussy described Ravel as "extraordinarily gifted but what annoys me is the attitude he adopts of being a 'conjurer'... casting spells and making flowers burst out of chairs."

The "Batman vs. Superman" style rivalry between the two was once even exploited in a grand marketing scheme. In order to showcase their newly-designed chromatic harp, the Pleyel harp manufacturing company commissioned Debussy to write a piece showcasing the instrument's capabilities in 1904; a year later Pleyel's competitor Érard

commissioned Ravel to do the same for their competing harp design. The Ravel-endorsed double-action harp ultimately won the day, though both compositions are now staples of the modern harp repertoire.

Given his “frenemy” status with Debussy, it must have given Ravel a bit of heartburn when, in 1903, Debussy published his *Estampes* for solo piano. Included in this collection was a movement entitled “Evening in Granada”, which was something of a drunken collage of laid-back Spanish night-life, including a recurring habanera motive. Debussy’s piano piece was suspiciously similar to an unpublished habanera that Ravel had written almost a decade prior; some historians claim that Debussy had heard the earlier piece, had seen the score, and had mimicked it explicitly in *Estampes*.

Thus, when in 1907 Ravel decided to expand his earlier habanera into an orchestral work called *Rapsodie Espagnole*, he fastidiously ensured that the pre-*Estampes* date was included in the score. This was a subtle attempt to address what might have seemed like Ravel pirating Debussy’s piano piece. In any case, if either composer could lay personal claim to the Spanish flavor of the habanera, it would be Ravel, who was born in the Basque region of southwestern France, where French and Spanish culture freely intermingle. Though his family moved to Paris before his first birthday, Ravel long treasured his Basque heritage and frequently included Spanish-inspired elements in his music.

## *Rapsodie Espagnole* Listening Guide

### **First movement: Prelude to the Night**

♩ **METER:** In one of his signature techniques, Ravel effectively uses two meters at once. Though this movement is in three, the main overarching motive of four descending eighth notes, “feels” like it’s in two. This downward-stepping motive will re-emerge at various moments throughout the piece.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION:** Ravel interrupts the surreptitious forward flow of this introduction with a miniature cadenza for two clarinets; the bassoons take the same role a few phrases later.

### **Second movement: Malagueña**

♩ **DYNAMICS:** The introductory movement utilizes entirely quiet dynamics. Having set our expectation at such a quiet level, Ravel transitions smoothly into the louder and more active second movement with an elegant crescendo.

### **Third movement: Habanera**

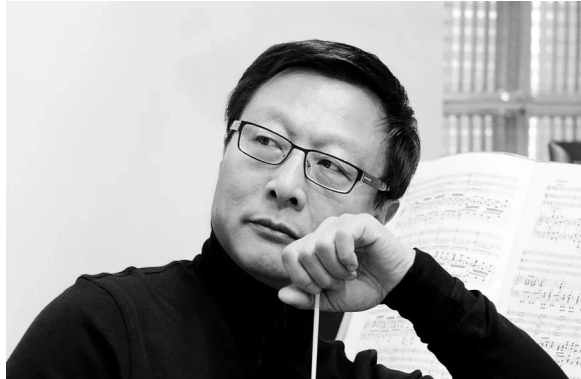
♩ **TIMBRE:** The shadowy echo emitted by the horns is called “stopped horn”, where the players are directed to place their fists firmly inside the bell of the horn. The change in how the instrument produces tone is so extreme that the players actually have to play a half-step lower to produce the correct pitch.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION:** After fully introducing and developing the habanera rhythm, Ravel eventually supports it with very economical use of drum and tambourine.

### **Fourth movement: Festival**

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION:** Ravel is one of the great composers for harp, and his fourth movement uses a wide variety of harp techniques, including pinging

harmonics and sweeping glissandos. He also uses two harps, sometimes to create more sound, and other times to increase the variety of chords available at one time (the harp's unique construction means one instrument can only produce a limited number of different pitches without changing the pedal settings).



## BRIGHT SHENG (b. 1955)

### *Of Time and Love:*

### Concerto for Viola and Orchestra

**Instrumentation:** piccolo, 2 flutes (second flute doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (second oboe doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons (second bassoon doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, 3 percussion, harp, solo viola and strings.

#### QCSO Premiere.

Composer Bright Sheng writes:

"I have always had a soft spot in my heart for the viola, particularly for its variety of characters, from the sweet, lyrical to the rough and dramatic. The work is also inspired by the fine musicianship of Roberto Diaz, an artist who is both a virtuoso and exceptionally musical. I was happy to have the opportunity to write a viola concerto—I made sure the instrument would express the range of traits and,

the solo part would sing mostly throughout the composition.

"The work was written during the thick of the Pandemic, which reset everyone's complacency. When human life becomes fragile, only love is timeless."

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## HUGO WOLF (1860-1903)

### *Italian Serenade*

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, solo viola and strings.

**Premiere:** The original version of the *Italian Serenade* for string quartet was premiered in May of 1890 in Mannheim, Germany. The chamber orchestral version, which was edited by composer Max Reger, premiered on January 29, 1904 in Graz, Austria, with Richard Wickenhauser conducting.

#### QCSO Premiere.

Born in 1860, Austrian composer Hugo Wolf is a troubled if colorful figure in late-nineteenth-century musical Vienna. He was a prominent and notorious music critic, making a special enemy in Johannes Brahms. In an 1887 review, for example, he blasted: "What was provided on this occasion was not to our taste: Brahms — no small dose of sleeping powder for weak nerves. Such programming reeks of lethal intent and should really be forbidden by the police!"

As a composer, Wolf's main claim to fame has always been his *lieder* (German-language songs); aside from these, he composed little else. His sole orchestral piece to find a place in the modern repertoire is his *Italian Serenade*, which is an orchestral arrangement of an earlier string quartet featuring a prominent viola part. As Ravel would do a decade later with *Rapsodie Espagnole*,

Wolf had hoped to expand the serenade into a four-movement work. But tragically, having contracted syphilis, Wolf died in a Viennese insane asylum at the age of 42. He never heard a public performance of his single-movement *Serenade*, which was premiered eleven months after his untimely death.



### *Italian Serenade* Listening Guide

♫ **MELODY:** Like many Austro-German composers, Wolf followed in Beethoven's footsteps by basing his melodies on a small number of distinct, short motives.

♫ **COUNTERPOINT:** When the big viola melody returns about halfway through the overture, Wolf places a fleeting, descant-like melody above it in the flute.

♫ **INSTRUMENTATION:** For all the viola features, Wolf gives a true "show-stopping" solo to the cello, providing a transition from the near-constant forward flow of the overture's first half.

### EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934)

#### *In the South (Alassio)*, Op. 50

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (third flute doubling piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

**Premiere:** March 16, 1904 by the Hallé Orchestra, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London.  
**QCSO Premiere.**

Prior to successful 1901 premiere of *Enigma Variations*, Edward Elgar had little reason to expect that he would eventually occupy a prominent place in the history of British music. For most of the first four decades of his life Elgar labored in obscurity, holding all manner of humble musical positions, from parish music director to composer-in-residence at a mental hospital. Having slowly built a his audience in the 1890s, his reputation skyrocketed in the early years of the twentieth century, and by 1904 a major

festival of his music was planned at London's most prestigious venue, Covent Garden. Even King Edward and Queen Alexandra attended the festival's first evening, unthinkable names on Elgar's guest list even five years prior.

Those who attended the festival's final night were happily surprised to learn that Elgar had composed a new work just for the occasion. This was the concert overture *In the South*, subtitled "Alassio" after the picturesque Italian region where Elgar had vacationed with his family the year before.

In his manuscript, Elgar included quotations relating to Italy and the Roman empire, including passages from Tennyson's *The Daisy* and Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The prominent viola part Elgar wrote for *In the South* may have been an oblique reference to Berlioz's viola concerto *Harold in Italy*, composed nearly a century before and also based on Byron's famous work.

### *In the South* Listening Guide

♪ **MELODY:** Elgar opens with an exuberant and frenetic upward gesture implying adventure and excitement. It is strikingly similar to the opening of Richard Strauss's *Don Juan*, which had premiered about fifteen years prior.

♪ **FORM:** After the bold opening theme, Elgar introduces warmer, more melancholy secondary theme to contrast.

♪ **MELODY:** In various contexts throughout this overture, Elgar uses ascending scales as prominent motives. Uses of the ascending scale range from rushing upward gestures in the heavy

brass to a halting, uneven motive that marks major transitions in the work.

♪ **INSTRUMENTATION:** From all the sound and fury of the overture's first half emerges an unusual and elegant viola solo, sometimes performed separately as "Canto Popolare". Elgar himself was a violist and often gave the instrument a special place in his works; notice how carefully he constructs the melody's accompaniment to allow this easily-covered instrument to shine.

