

Quad City Symphony Orchestra
PROGRAM NOTES
Masterworks IV: Love

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MIKHAIL IVANOVICH GLINKA
(1804-1857)

Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.

Premiere: November 27, 1842, Imperial Bolshoi Kamenny Theatre, St. Petersburg.

QCSO Performance History: The *Ruslan and Lyudmila* overture has been performed six times previously in the Quad Cities: in 1930 with Ludwig Becker; in 1942 and 1947 with Oscar Anderson; in 1955 with Piero Bellugi; in 1959 with Charles Gigante; and most recently, at the Riverfront Pops in 1997 with Gary Fagin conducting.

Although Russia served as an important musical outpost from the time of Peter the Great (1672-1725), much of the art music produced there up until the mid-19th century was highly Italianate in character, owing to the large number of Italian musicians imported by Tsar Peter and his successors. It wasn't until the early nineteenth century that a distinctive national musical style emerged, pioneered by composer Mikhail Glinka. Glinka aimed to imbue his music with the Russian national character. "We inhabitants of the north feel differently," Glinka said. "Life's experiences touch us either not at all or sink deep into our souls. With us, it is either mad boisterousness or bitter tears. Even love, that wondrous emotion which

brightens the entire universe, is always bound up in us with a certain sadness."

Capturing the Russian spirit in music, particularly through his two operas *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, earned him the admiration of generations of subsequent Russian composers. "Glinka was the Russian musical hero of my childhood," said Igor Stravinsky. "He was always *sans reproche* [above reproach] and this is the way I still think of him. His music is minor, of course, but he is not; all music in Russia stems from him."

Born in 1804 to an aristocratic family, he attended a prestigious boarding school in St. Petersburg. Because Russia had no conservatory system at the time, he sought training in the art of music wherever he could find it; first, with expatriate Irish pianist and composer John Field, and then on various extended travels throughout the European continent, including long visits to Germany, Italy, France, and Spain.

Ruslan and Lyudmila, his second and final opera, is based on a poetic work by iconic Russian writer Alexander Pushkin, whose works would also later inspire Tchaikovsky's operas *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. The story is a fairy tale, with Lyudmila as a Sleeping Beauty of sorts, and Ruslan as her Russian Prince Charming.

Although the opera is not often staged in its entirety, its spirited overture has become a concert-opener mainstay.

Ruslan and Lyudmila Listening Guide

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** This work is famous for its furiously fast scale passages for the strings. As you see the strings whiz up and down their instruments, listen to the rest of the orchestra for spirited and sometimes-unexpected interjections by the other instruments.

♫ **FORM:** Although his work is Russian to the core, Glinka knew Italian opera conventions extremely well, having studied with both Bellini and Donizetti, Italian opera's leading lights. Hence, this overture follows the standard form for Italian opera overture. Simply put, there are two main themes, and everything gets played twice, with a rousing coda at the end.

♫ **HARMONY:** Near the end of this overture, listen for a somewhat ambiguous and mysterious scale. Glinka may be the first composer to use the "whole tone scale", or a scale of all whole steps. Decades later, this scale would become a favorite of Russian and French composers.

GABRIEL URBAIN FAURÉ (1845-1924)

Pelléas et Mélisande, Op. 80

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, 2 harps, and strings.

Premiere: Fauré's incidental music to Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande* premiered on June 21, 1898 at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, London, conducted by the composer. The

orchestral suite premiered in February 1891 at the Concerts Lamoureux in Paris, conducted by Camille Chevillard.

QCSO Performance History: Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande* is a relatively recent addition to the QCSO's repertoire; James Dixon led the first performances in 1992. It has been heard here twice since then: in 1996, led by Kim Allen Kluge, and in 2014, by Mark Russell Smith.

PÉLLÉAS: It is perhaps the last time I shall see thee... I must go away forever...

MÉLISANDE: Why sayest thou always thou wilt go away?...

PÉLLÉAS: I must tell thee what thou knowest already?—Thou knowest not what I am going to tell thee?

MÉLISANDE: Why, no; why, no; I know nothing—...

PÉLLÉAS: Thou knowest not why I must go afar.... Thou knowest not it is because ... (*He kisses her abruptly.*) I love thee....

MÉLISANDE (*in a low voice*): I love thee too...

PÉLLÉAS: Oh! oh! What saidst thou, Mélisande?... I hardly heard it!... Thou sayest that in a voice coming from the end of the world!... I hardly heard thee.... Thou lovest me?—Thou lovest me too?... Since when lovest thou me?...

These lines are from Belgian poet Maurice Maeterlinck's dreamy 1893 fantasy *Pelléas et Mélisande*. If it seems to you like the lovers are having a difficult time understanding each other, it may well be because Maeterlinck is included among a group of poets known as Symbolists, whose works are bathed in ambiguity, mystery, and (you guessed it) symbolism. With their emphasis on unspoken sentiment and esoteric knowledge, it is perhaps not surprising that Symbolist poets have provided inspiration to many composers. Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et*

Mélisande specifically has been highly influential in that regard.

Most famously, Claude Debussy used Maeterlinck's play as the text for his only opera, a project that consumed and haunted him for years. This is why, when the English actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell asked Debussy to write incidental music (the theatrical equivalent of a movie score) for the first English production of the play in London, Debussy had to decline. It instead fell to Gabriel Fauré to provide the requested accompaniment, which he did, much to his benefactress's satisfaction. Three years later, Fauré reorchestrated parts of the incidental music into the well-known Suite, Op. 80. Unaware of either Fauré's or Debussy's works, Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg composed a tone poem based on *Pelléas* in 1903; Jean Sibelius followed with his own incidental music for the play in 1905.

By coincidence, both Fauré's score and the Poulenc concerto that follows on this program are dedicated to the Princesse de Polignac, an American-born, well-heeled patroness of French music. Among the many other works dedicated to her is Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte*.

Pelleas et Mélisande Suite Listening Guide

Prelude

- ♫ **MELODY:** The prelude is marked with many long, mostly stepwise and very elegant melodies. To contrast, listen for the puzzling, repeated-note horn solo near the movement's end.
- ♫ **TIMBRE:** After this horn solo, notice the muffled sound in the strings; all but the double basses have put on their

mutes. It's almost as if Maeterlinck's Symbolist spirit has descended on the theatre!

The Spinner: Andantino quasi Allegretto

- ♫ **TEXTURE:** Fauré depicts a spinning wheel with fast running triplets (still muted) in the first violins. Around this he constructs a bewitching texture, with pizzicato (plucking) in the other strings and long lines in the woodwinds.

Sicilienne

- ♫ **TIMBRE:** This movement, borrowed from an earlier work of Fauré's, is a favorite of harpists. Notice that at the ends of phrases, the plucking of the harp is joined with pizzicato in the strings.
- ♫ **HARMONY:** The outer sections of this piece are flavored with the Dorian mode, which is very similar to minor but, due to a raised sixth scale degree, has a somewhat lighter, more relaxed affect (the English tune *Greensleeves* is often performed in Dorian mode)

The Death of Melisande: Molto adagio

- ♫ **RHYTHM:** Slow dotted rhythms (long note followed by short note) often mark funeral marches, but for so tragic a death, a single dot was not enough; these are actually *double-dotted* rhythms, where a very long note is followed by a very short one.

FRANCIS POULENC (1899-1963)
Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra in D minor, FP 61

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (second doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (second doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, percussion, and strings.

Premiere: September 5, 1932, the composer and Jacques Février as soloists, with the La Scala Orchestra, Désiré Defauw, conductor, Venice.

QCSO Performance History: Poulenc's two-piano concerto premiered in the Quad Cities in 1947, with well-known piano duo Arthur Whittemore and Jack Lowe as soloists and Oscar Anderson conducting. Charles Gigante led performances in 1961, again with Whittemore & Lowe, and the duo returned to perform the work twice again under James Dixon's direction, in 1966 and 1977. Dixon also led performances of the work in 1985 with the French sister-duo Katia and Marielle Labèque.

As one of the more successful of the cadre of early twentieth-century French composers known as *Les Six*, Francis Poulenc was a master at juxtaposing apparently-contradictory ideas. Compare, for example, his two most well-known operas: *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1947), an absurdist comedy featuring a hero who fathers 40,049 children and a heroine with giant balloons for breasts, with *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1956), a profoundly spiritual, deeply serious telling of the true story of an order of nuns, who together faced the guillotine during the French Revolution. This kind of range from the ridiculous to the sublime was a trademark of Poulenc's, and something he considered deeply French. "You will find sobriety and dolor in French music just as in German or Russian," Poulenc said in 1950, "but the French have a keener sense of proportion. We realize that somberness and good

humor are not mutually exclusive. Our composers, too, write profound music, but when they do, it is leavened with that lightness of spirit without which life would be unendurable."

Poulenc's "keen sense of proportion" (more Germanic-inclined listeners might consider it a penchant for hodgepodge) is clearly exhibited in his relatively early Concerto for Two Pianos (1932), premiered when the composer was 33 years old. The work juxtaposes bursts of exuberant energy with moments of spiritual wonder, sultry nightclub music, and Haydn-esque neoclassicism. The somewhat unusual use of double piano soloists has a few important precedents, including works by Mendelssohn and Mozart (who also wrote a concerto for *three* pianos!). Two years after Poulenc's concerto premiered, Stravinsky likewise made a contribution to the genre.

**Concerto for Two Pianos
Listening Guide**

First movement: Allegro ma non troppo

♩ **TIMBRE:** At the work's opening, listen for Poulenc's intriguing variety of short sounds, including a military drum. Also notice his deft usage of the brass mutes.

♩ **INSTRUMENTATION:** One might expect that the two pianos would occupy a very wide range between them, but for much of the concerto, the two pianos cover remarkably similar territory on their respective keyboards. The result of this is that in many moments, the work sounds like an enhanced single piano.

♩ **FORM:** As is common in Poulenc's works, the form gains its life from juxtaposing wildly varying ideas rather than developing them with careful rigor. Be

prepared for very abrupt transitions into widely contrasting material.

♫ **TIMBRE:** Listen for the ghostly melody in the solo cello near the end of the first movement. This solo is entirely in *harmonics*. String players produce these flute-like tones by touching the string lightly, allowing the string to vibrate on either side of the left-hand finger.

Second movement: Larghetto

♫ **STYLE:** Poulenc had strong neoclassical leanings, and he exhibits these clearly in the second movement, especially in the Mozartean opening melody, which recurs frequently.

Finale: Allegro molto

♫ **RHYTHM:** Employing another favored technique for unpredictability, Poulenc drastically varies the lengths of his phrases throughout this movement.

SERGEI SERGEYEVICH PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

Excerpts from *Romeo and Juliet*, Op. 64

Instrumentation: Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, cornet, 3 trombones, tuba, tenor saxophone, timpani, percussion, harp, piano/celesta, and strings.

Premiere: Prokofiev's ballet was first staged on December 30, 1938 at the Mahen Theatre, Brno, Czechoslovakia, in the composer's absence. Although the ballet did not premiere in Soviet Russia until 1940, Prokofiev conducted a recording of the music with the Moscow Philharmonic in 1938.

QCSO Performance History: James Dixon led two series of performances of music from *Romeo and Juliet* in 1973 and 1988; Leslie B. Dunner subsequently conducted the work in 1999. Mark Russell Smith has led QCSO performances on twice previously: in 2008, and in 2016 on a Side-by-Side concert.

Disturbed by the Revolution of 1917, Sergei Prokofiev departed his native Russia in 1918 with the approval of the Soviet government, subsequently avoiding travel to back to the U.S.S.R. for 15 years, and spending extended time in the U.S., Germany, and Paris. But by 1932, he had begun looking homeward, and during that decade decided to make peace with what had by then become the established regime. For all his efforts, he eventually earned both disdain from some Western commentators (who saw him as a sellout to Soviet powers) and the direct censure of the Communist Party in 1948.

But with that horror still in the distant future, the 1930s, the decade of his repatriation, were uniquely productive for Prokofiev. During these years he produced the much-loved *Peter and the Wolf*, along with two now-legendary film scores, one for the bureaucratic comedy *Lieutenant Kije* and the other for the epic tragedy *Alexander Nevsky*. He would successfully adapt both film scores into concert works. And the decade also allowed him a chance to re-engage ballet, a genre which had caused him some difficulty in the past.

The St. Petersburg-based Kirov Ballet (later to be re-named the Mariinsky) commissioned Prokofiev for a ballet version of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1935. As is often the case, the path from commission to premiere was full of delays and detours, including controversy about including a (frankly unfathomable) happy ending for Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers. The work eventually premiered in Czechoslovakia, but government-imposed travel restrictions prevented Prokofiev from attending.

The composer constructed three orchestral suites from the music for the ballet; the movements on this weekend's concerts are drawn mainly from the Suite No. 2.

Romeo and Juliet Listening Guide

The Montagues and the Capulets

♫ **HARMONY:** Prokofiev portrays the discord between Shakespeare's infamous warring families with overwhelmingly dissonant chords.

♫ **MELODY:** The movement features a very prominent, very ponderous melody. Reminiscent of Shostakovich, this tune is made up mostly of skips and leaps, with little step-wise motion. Later Prokofiev couples it with a purely step-wise melody in the horns, leading to a more delicate incarnation in the solo flute. The ponderous version returns at the movement's close.

The Young Juliet

♫ **MELODY:** Prokofiev here employs flighty, major-scale figures not unlike Glinka's scales in the *Ruslan and Lyudmila* overture.

♫ **TEXTURE:** To contrast the ballet's frequently thick, full-ensemble textures, Prokofiev includes some passages that resemble chamber music, including a trio-like moment for two flutes and cello.

♫ **INSTRUMENTATION:** Prokofiev, like Ravel and a few others, integrates a solo saxophone into his orchestra. However, unlike Ravel, who wrote soloistically for the saxophone in *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Prokofiev's saxophone writing in this movement is very carefully blended with the rest of the ensemble.

Friar Lawrence

♫ **TIMBRE:** To portray the sympathetic Friar, Prokofiev uses instruments of dark timbre, especially double bass, clarinet, and horn. The bass clarinet even has a lonely solo near the movement's end.

Dance

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** In a manner not unlike Poulenc's in his two-piano concerto, Prokofiev carefully integrates the timbre of the piano into the rest of the orchestra.

Romeo and Juliet Before Parting

♫ **INSTRUMENTATION:** Although usually doubling the bassoon, cellos, and basses, the bass clarinet here has an unusually prominent role for extended passages of this movement.

The Death of Tybalt

♫ **RHYTHM:** Prokofiev sets the fateful death of Tybalt by contrasting wild, frenzied rhythms with a slow, steady, almost militaristic beat.

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** Prokofiev composed many furiously difficult brass passages in this movement.

Romeo at Juliet's Grave

♫ **FORM:** Prokofiev opens this movement in the strings with intense counterpoint. The bulk of the movement employs a wide ranging, almost Hollywood-like style, but the coda is sparse, with wide range between voices, like a death-knell.

Juliet's Death

♫ **HARMONY:** Prokofiev depicts the heroine's death with many painful, clashing chords, which can't seem to decide whether they are major or minor. Ultimately, he lays Juliet to rest with a profoundly peaceful major chord.