

Sinfonia Toronto - October 22, 2023

Program notes by Dr. Lorne Tepperman

Regard de l'anniversaire XXV

World premiere

Louis Sauter

(1955 -)

Louis Sauter is a French musician who, before retiring also had a notable career as an electrical engineer. He carried out research in speech processing and multimedia and moved into management, including serving as project manager of the Planck HFI Ground Segment, part of an astrophysics mission which enriched our understanding of the universe. His engineering and music have sometimes combined, in a project at the famous new-music centre IRCAM and consulting for a national opera house.

A mostly self-taught musician, Sauter benefited from attending sessions by Olivier Messiaen and studying composition and orchestration with Ricardo Nillni. As a tenor in the Padeloup and Orchestre Colonne Choirs, he has performed in the Salle Pleyel, Chartres Cathedral and the Palais Omnisports de Bercy, for French Television and on several cd recordings.

He has composed over a hundred works for solo instruments, voice, chamber ensembles and orchestra. His compositions have been recorded and performed by professional musicians and music schools throughout Europe as well as in the US, Canada, Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Nigeria and Japan.

Magnificent Roots

World premiere (1974 -)

Frank Horvat

Notes by the composer:

When Sinfonia Toronto's Music Director, Nurhan Arman, approached me to compose a concert overture in celebration of their 25th anniversary season, I immediately thought about how it would be fitting to base the composition on something positive and triumphant in the history of this wonderful city I am happy to call my home. Toronto is blessed to have had many citizens who have made a positive impact on our world. But I also considered the wonderful flora and fauna of the city. I happened to come across a story about Toronto's oldest tree, an approximately 250-year-old red oak which is located in the backyard of a house located at 76 Coral Gable Drive. This was beautiful fate that brought me to this tree as it happens to also be located in the North York section of the city, just as is one of the venues (the George Weston Recital Hall) that Sinfonia Toronto calls home.

Composing *Magnificent Roots* has prompted me to think about how celebrating remarkable nature is similar to celebrating amazing human achievement. After all, we are all living things in this city. Just as esteemed Torontonians have contributed so much to the lives of their fellow citizens, so does a tree like this Historic Red Oak, as it has provided sanctuary, protection, clean air, and heightened spirituality to those who have passed its way for centuries, despite being threatened by that very species it helped and nurtured. I feel we should pay homage and celebrate this tree's achievements just as much as any humans who have graced this city, not only because of what it has contributed in the past, but all that it will contribute to our collective future.

It is an honour to use the composition of *Magnificent Roots* to also celebrate this special anniversary for a special and important Toronto cultural institution. This work was commissioned by Sinfonia Toronto with the financial support of the SOCAN Foundation and private patrons.

Violin Concerto No. 2

Canadian premiere

Otar Vasilidze Taktakishvili

(1924-1989)

Otar Vasilidze Taktakishvili was a well-known composer, conductor, teacher, and musicologist during the Soviet era. He was raised in Tbilisi by his mother alone, a noblewoman, before the revolution, who found work as an artist at the Georgian Opera House. His early years were filled with music thanks to his mother and extended family. His uncle Shalva Taktakishvili was a composer and professor at the Tbilisi Conservatory and had a significant impact on his musical development. Otar showed exceptional potential from an early age; as a young child he could recognise piano passages while blindfolded.

Shortly after entering the Tbilisi Conservatory, while Georgia was at war with Germany in 1942, Taktakishvili wrote the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic's anthem. After seeing the anthem's lyrics in a newspaper, his mother had pushed him to enter the competition to set them to music. The 19-year-old finished his version "in one try," entered it, and promptly forgot about it. He only realized that his music had been chosen when he heard it while standing outside the inaugural concert auditorium.

Taktakishvili was influenced by Georgian folk music, Mozart, Bach, Beethoven and more contemporary composers like Scriabin, Prokofiev and Shostakovich. He met Shostakovich during his senior year of high school, which sparked a lifelong relationship and collaboration.

In 1949 he was appointed conductor and artistic director of the Georgian State Chorus and professor at the Conservatory. Taktakishvili attained remarkable political fame: in addition to receiving the 1982 Lenin Prize, one of the USSR's highest awards, he was also awarded three other USSR State Prizes and held Deputy positions to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR, was a member of the UNESCO International Music Council's Presidium, Georgian Minister of Culture from 1965 to 1984, chairman of the Georgian Composers' Union, board member of the USSR Composers' Union from 1957 to 1989 and chair or a jury member for many international competitions.

Taktakishvili's work spanned various genres, though many consider his vocal music, with a focus on folk music, to be his main contribution. The complex musical language of composers in the previous generation, including Prokofiev and Shostakovich, had led to State criticism. However, later composers like Taktakishvili could use a more straightforward, approachable style without fear of rebuke from their Russian peers and State officials. His sonata for flute and piano is perhaps his best-known composition in the West. Other well-known works include several operas, two symphonies, four piano concertos, two violin concertos, and two cello concertos.

Violin Concerto #2 for violin and chamber orchestra, which we will hear tonight, was completed between 1985 and 1987, shortly before the composer's death in 1989. It is an easily accessible work, with features of early modernism and late romanticism. It is very much in the Russian/European style and reminiscent of works by Shostakovich. The first movement has a menacing, troubling atmosphere. The slower second movement is lyrical and contemplative. The third movement is at some points frantic and nightmarish, Kafkaesque. The dominant feature of this concerto is a continuous exchange between the soloist and string orchestra, more resembling a duet than a virtuoso solo with an accompaniment.

Zigeunerweisen, 'Gypsy Airs'

Pablo de Sarasate

Orchestral arrangement by Nurhan Arman(1844-1908)

One of the most popular of all virtuoso violin pieces, Zigeunerweisen was written in 1878 and premiered that same year in Leipzig by its "idol"-status composer and performer. Like Paganini, Sarasate wrote many of his own showpieces. Based Roma themes, Zigeunerweisen remains his best-known work and a staple of the violin repertoire. Its popularity prompted an early recording, Sarasate's own performance in 1904.

Zigeunerweisen is written as one continuous movement, surging through four very different emotional states. The opening moderato section is a noble but foreboding theme which devolves into a mournful lento that feels spontaneous and improvised, with emotional interjections by the violin incorporating rapid scales and other technically demanding passages. Next the muted violin expresses an even more melancholy meditation on life's trials and tribulations, but finally bursts into the final allegro molto vivace section which calls on all the soloist's virtuosity to portray a scene of hectic joy and excitement.

Symphony No.5 in C minor

Ludwig van Beethoven

Canadian premiere: string orchestra arrangement by Sreten Krstić(1770-1824)

The "Da DaDa DUUUM" four-note opening of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 is arguably the most famous series of notes in all of Western music. Whether or not the phrase represents the sound of Fate knocking at the door as some have said, it is certainly ominous. It warns us that dramatic ideas will follow.

No composer was more serious about the value of his musical work than Beethoven; he must have seen this symphony as dramatic and significant. More than that, throughout his life Beethoven was preoccupied with concepts of freedom and heroism, and these are ideas that come to our minds when we listen to the Symphony No. 5. The Fifth takes the theme of heroic struggle that Beethoven first explored in the Third and expands it. Not only is this the Fifth remarkable for its unrelenting, courageous energy; it also displays masterful architectural structure. For example, the entire first movement derives from the opening four-note phrase and every other element is derived from this motif.

There is an assertive, sometimes brutal clarity about Beethoven's work that rivets our attention. Here he is not writing music for an aristocratic patron to decorate and celebrate a privileged lifestyle. He is writing for posterity, and he is not joking. Beethoven wrote this Symphony when he was in his mid-thirties, his growing deafness was causing him anguish, and the Napoleonic Wars, unrest in Austria, and the seizure of Vienna by Napoleon's forces in 1805 had shaken his world.

Beethoven took a lot of time and care developing his musical ideas for the Fifth Symphony. After finishing his Third in 1804, began creating first rough drafts for the Fifth. He took frequent breaks from it to let his ideas simmer while he completed other pieces, including his Violin Concerto, Fourth Piano Concerto, 'Appassionata' Piano Sonata and three 'Razumovsky' String Quartets.

The Fifth Symphony features four movements, as is typical of Classical era symphonies. The first movement is written in the conventional sonata form, which Beethoven inherited from Haydn and Mozart. After the opening four bars, Beethoven develops his famous four-note theme with ingenious repetitions and variations.

The second movement is a lyrical composition in which two themes alternate. A lengthy coda follows the variations on these themes. A Scherzo and trio make up the symphony's third movement, the more modern scherzo and trio form, replacing the minuet and trio customary before Beethoven's innovations.

The finale surprises with a key change. Usually, a symphony starting in C minor will end in that key, but Beethoven chose instead to end in C Major, suggesting a joyful resolution to the turmoil and angst of the first movement. As the symphony approaches its conclusion, the tempo rises to presto, with 29 fortissimo bars of C major chords. According to Charles Rosen in *The Classical Style*, Beethoven's sense of proportion is reflected in this ending, which calls for an "unbelievably long" pure C major cadence to relieve the earlier tension of this huge work.