

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897): Hungarian Dance No. 5 (1858-68)**

In 1850, pianist and composer Johannes Brahms met Eduard Reményi, a Jewish Hungarian violinist, from whom he learned something of Roma music and Hungarian dances called csárdás. Brahms was enthralled and used the rhythms and melodies of this music as his inspiration for his 21 Hungarian Dances, which he originally wrote for the piano. He introduced this Gypsy-inspired music to a whole new audience when he wrote the dances—and then began super-sizing them for an entire orchestra.

Brahms made it clear that he regarded his *Hungarian Dances* not as original works, but as arrangements of existing melodies that he thought were Hungarian folk tunes. For this reason, he intentionally did not assign them opus numbers. Despite Brahms' insistence that he was the transcriber, not the author, there still was controversy regarding the origin of the folk tunes. Reményi claimed he was the actual composer of some of the melodies Brahms used in his *Hungarian Dances* and accused Brahms of plagiarizing the melodies he wrote. Brahms discovered that some of the melodies he'd used weren't folk tunes at all, but were melodies written by local composers. For example, the *Hungarian Dance No. 5* uses the Csárdás melody composed by Hungarian composer Béla Kéler and the melody used in the Vivace section towards the end of Hungarian Dance No. 5 came from a Hungarian folk song collected by Ignác Bognár in 1858. The source material for the melodies used by Brahms' in his *Hungarian Dances* is still a matter of debate among music scholars. Regardless of who created the melodies, the Hungarian Dance No.5 transforms the intimate drama of the Gypsy band into a big orchestral party of fast and furious string melodies and brassy foot-stomping rhythms.

### **Albert William Ketèlby (1875-1959): Sanctuary of the Heart (ca. 1910)**

Albert William Ketèlbey was an English composer, conductor and pianist, best known for his short pieces of light orchestral music. At the age of eleven he wrote a piano sonata that won praise from Edward Elgar, and he beat Gustav Holst in competition for a musical scholarship. After a brilliant student career at Trinity College of Music in London, he did not pursue a classical path but instead became the musical director of the Vaudeville Theatre.

He was multi-talented in music. He composed light music, conducting his own works and making arrangements for smaller orchestras. He also found great success writing music for silent films until the advent of talking films in the late 1920s. His light works for orchestra were popular and many became best sellers, and by the late 1920's, he was Britain's first millionaire composer.

Ketèlbey's popularity began to fade during the Second World War and his originality also declined; many of his post-war works were re-workings of older pieces and he increasingly found his music ignored by the BBC. In 1949 he moved to the Isle of Wight, where he spent his retirement, and he died at home in obscurity, with only a handful of mourners at his funeral.

### **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893): Excerpts from *The Nutcracker*, Op. 71 (1892)**

- Act I, No. 8, Scene
- Act I, No. 9, Waltz of the Snowflakes
- Act II, No. 12, Divertissement, *Le chocolat*
- Act II, No. 14, Pas de Deux, Coda
- Act II, No. 15, Waltz Finale and A

Oh, *The Nutcracker*! It's the perennial favorite Christmas program and main breadwinner of nearly every ballet theater in the world. The story of *The Nutcracker* is loosely based on the E.T.A.

Hoffmann fantasy story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, about a girl who befriends a nutcracker that comes to life on Christmas Eve and wages a battle against the evil Mouse King. It's hard to imagine that Tchaikovsky himself disliked this ballet, thinking it was mediocre at best, especially compared to his two other ballet successes, *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Examining the circumstances of its dismal premiere, one can understand why.

The chief choreographer of the Mariinsky Ballet Theater in St. Petersburg became ill right before rehearsals began. The assistant choreographer was uninterested in the ballet and showed even less interest in the extensive pantomime needed for the children in the opening scenes. The result was too undisciplined to charm its audience. One critic wrote: 'In the first scene, the entire stage is filled with children, who run about, blow their whistles, hop and jump, are naughty, and interfere with the oldsters dancing.' Worse still was the battle between the mice and the toys. Somebody had the idea of casting young members of a military academy to play the toy soldiers who, it seems, got carried away attacking the mice with their toy rifles! Additionally, the scenery and costumes were panned as tasteless, and the performance of the ballerina who danced the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy was widely criticized.

On the positive side, Tchaikovsky discovered a new instrument: the celesta, whose clear, bell-like tone was perfectly fitted to *The Nutcracker's* fairy-tale ambience. In the celesta's ethereal notes, Tchaikovsky recognized the "voice" of his Sugar Plum Fairy, and he immediately wrote to his publisher, asking that the instrument be acquired for the performances.

Another striking feature is the score's array of children's instruments, including toy trumpets, toy drums, cuckoos, and cymbals, all intended to be played on-stage by the child performers in the opening party scene. Tchaikovsky and Vsevolozhsky had planned from the outset that children would play a major role in *The Nutcracker*, a highly unusual and controversial decision for that time.

Despite the failure of its initial performance, *The Nutcracker* has become the most frequently performed of all ballets and has served as an introduction to classical music for many young people.

### **Edward Elgar (1857-1934): Salut d'amour, Op. 12 (1888)**

In the summer of 1888, Edward Elgar composed *Salut d'Amour* as a love song to his future bride, Caroline Alice Roberts, and he called it "*Liebesgruss*" ('Love's Greeting') because of Miss Roberts' fluency in German. On their engagement she had already presented him with a poem she had written entitled *Love's Grace*. Elgar, much taken with Alice's poem, decided to reciprocate with a short piece of music especially for her. In contrast to the German title, the dedication was in French: "*à Carice*," a mashup of Alice's first and middle names, Caroline Alice. Elgar presented the musical love poem to his future bride, and they were married the following year. At the birth of their daughter two years later, they named her Carice.

*Salut d'Amour* was published later by the German publisher Schott & Co. after buying it outright from Elgar for two guineas (about \$2.50). Few copies were sold until Schott changed the title to "*Salut d'Amour*" with *Liebesgruss* as a sub-title, and the composer's name as 'Ed. Elgar' to give the composer a more exotic air. The French title, Elgar realized, would help the work to be sold not only in France but in other European countries. Apparently, the tactic worked, for sales increased dramatically to the publisher's delight, but with no financial gain for Elgar. Towards the end of 1888, Edward submitted three arrangements of the work – for solo piano, for violin and piano, and an orchestral arrangement in order to increase the prospects of performances. Even today, *Salut d'Amour* is arguably the best-known of Elgar's smaller-scale works.

### **Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): Infernal Dance of King Kastchei from *The Firebird*, K010 (1910)**

The son of one of Russia's leading opera singers, Igor Stravinsky grew up surrounded by music, although he only began to pursue it seriously at 17, when he began studying privately with Rimsky-Korsakov, Russia's most prominent living composer. In this ballet, the first major work Stravinsky completed after his teacher's death in 1908, Stravinsky would put Rimsky-Korsakov's musical language to work. *The Firebird* is in some ways the great ballet Rimsky-Korsakov never wrote.

For *The Firebird*, Russian choreographer Sergei Diaghilev originally planned to hire a composer with whom he had worked before, Alexander Tcherepnin, but he dropped out. Next Diaghilev turned to Anatoly Lyadov, but he also fell through. Diaghilev briefly considered Alexander Glazunov, then Russia's leading composer, but he wasn't interested. Running out of options, he turned to a young, relatively untested composer: Igor Stravinsky. A former student of the great Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky would at least be technically proficient, and being little-known, he would likely say yes to anything.

Diaghilev was right. Eager to make the ballet as Russian as possible, Diaghilev's team, including Stravinsky, concocted a story that combined the most famous characters from half-a-dozen Russian fairytales, including the Firebird, Prince Ivan-Tsarevich, thirteen dancing princesses and the evil sorcerer-king Kashchey the Deathless.

The famous *Infernal Dance* borrows its main melody from a passage in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Mlada* that represented a witches' sabbath. Stravinsky's genius for rhythm, however, transforms the idea with syncopations and a series of musical lightning bolts that startled many unsuspecting attendees of the Paris premiere in June of 1910. The ballet caused a sensation and catapulted Stravinsky to international fame. It is a testament to the 27-year-old composer's burgeoning genius that the score became one of the early 20th century's iconic masterpieces.

### **Aleksandr Borodin (1833-1887): Polovtsian Dances from *Prince Igor* (1869-87)**

**Alexander Borodin**, it seems, was always trying to write his music against the clock. For most of the time he worked as a highly successful scientist, lecturing in chemistry and overseeing the education of others, particularly establishing programs for women. Then there were the occasions of ill health – cholera and several minor heart attacks – to deal with. He worked his composing in during his leisure hours, much to the dismay of his musical colleagues, who clearly thought he should be devoting more time to his talents. That was particularly the case with his opera, *Prince Igor*, featuring the popular *Polovtsian Dances*.

When Borodin was looking for a subject to turn into an opera, a critic sent him a 12th-century epic poem, *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, which tells the story of the heroic antics of a 12th-century Russian prince – Igor, naturally – and his crusades against invading nomadic tribes. The *Polovtsian Dances* offer an exhilarating climax to the opera's second act, as Prince Igor and his son Vladimir are taken prisoner by Polovtsian leader Khan Konchak, who entertains them lavishly and calls on his slaves to perform the thrilling dances.

A number of the themes were incorporated into the 1953 Broadway musical *Kismet*, best known of which is the 'Gliding Dance of the Maidens', adapted into the song 'Stranger in Paradise'.

Borodin died unexpectedly before the opera was finished; however, composer Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov finished it with the aid of the up-and-coming composer Alexander Glazunov. Borodin had a splendid gift for melody and rhythm – all evident in this, the most popular of his works. It always leaves us wondering what he might have achieved if he had heeded his colleagues and put the chemistry aside for a little more composing.