

Season 2015/2016

Friday, 3 June 2016
Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation, 8pm

For Megalomaniacs

Conductor: **Daniel Raiskin**
Soloist: **Taras Shtonda**, bass

Program:

M. Mussorgsky: *Songs and Dances of Death*

Lullaby
Serenade
Trepak
The Field Marshal

Duration: approx. 19 minutes

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D. Shostakovich: Symphony No. 7 op. 60 (*Leningrad*)

Allegretto
Moderato (poco allegretto)
Adagio
Allegro non troppo
Duration: approx. 69 minutes

Concert master: Miroslav Pavlović

For centuries, Russian artists have felt strong affinity for literature, of Russian and foreign authors alike. Accordingly, vocal music has been regarded as the pinnacle of art owing to its blend of words and music, while its genres – solo song and opera – account for a large share of the Russian musical heritage. Conversely to operas, in which the key feature is the integration of the musical and dramatic elements, the vocal lyricism is dominated by a small intimate moment brought to life by music.

In the mid-1870s, Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) composed his *Songs and Dances of Death* – a cycle of songs for deep voice and piano, to poems by Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov. The original order of the songs was different than today. This song cycle is now considered a masterpiece in the *lied* genre, while the most remarkable singers have

included Nicolai Ghiaurov, Boris Christoff, Ferruccio Furlanetto, Paata Burchuladze, as well as Brigitte Fassbaender, Irina Arkhipova, Dmitri Hvorostovsky and Olga Borodina. For decades following their creation, the songs opened up space for inventiveness in the context of orchestration, leading to contributions from Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov (1882), Shostakovich, Denisov, Lascano, Raskatov and Breiner. Tonight, the audience will hear Shostakovich's orchestral version, written in 1962 for Galina Vishnevskaya, which was subsequently adapted for bass, as well as for baritone voice. Believing this song cycle to be too short, Shostakovich composed his Symphony No 14 for soprano, bass and chamber orchestra, with the same inspiration.

Death, as the theme of each song, permeates the series from the most lyrical to the most dramatic song – death of a child, death in youthful love, drunken death and death at battleground. In the first song, the *Lullaby*, a tired mother cradles her sick infant, when the apparition of Death appears, takes the child and rocks it to eternal sleep. The *Serenade* gives an image of a sick woman, who is being sang to by Death as a knight, describing her beauty in the song, until it finally takes her. *Trepak*, the Russian folk dance, gives the setting for the third song, in which the dramatic plot becomes more dynamic. A drunk stumbles into the snow and the figure of Death appears and invites him to dance. On top of the rhythm of the Russian folk dance, the song repeats the chant *Dies irae*, the traditional death motif. As he freezes to death, he dreams of summer fields, and song ends with this image. The dramaturgical climax is reached in the song *The Field Marshal*, which depicts a soldier on the battleground after the battle. He is the sole survivor, whose last salute to them invites the dead on both sides to make peace and parade together.

Symphony No 7 by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) is one of the most magnificent pieces of symphonic literature. In addition to being written for an exceptionally large orchestra, its duration of more than one hour also puts it in the group of similar works by Mahler and Bruckner. The central part of the symphony, its first movement, was composed between 1939 and 1941, before the famous 900-day Siege of Leningrad. Owing to the significance of this major historical event, the original dedication to Lenin was changed into the dedication to the city. The piece is nowadays considered as a symbol of resistance to Nazi totalitarianism and it is very popular in both the East and the West. The Leningrad premiere occurred in the midst of the surrounded city in August 1942, following its first performance in Moscow in April that same year. It was played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the London Proms in June, followed by the performance by the New York Philharmonic under Toscanini. The Leningrad performance required special preparations. The score was flown in by plane and, since most of the Leningrad Radio Orchestra had died of starvation or in combat, they were replaced by musicians who were temporarily brought back from the front.

The symphony's formal structure is conventional. After the introductory part, beaming with life, the rhythm of the snare drum announces a war atmosphere with the *theme of evil*, very closely reminiscent of Ravel's *Bolero*. It is joined by solo flute, and then the soldiers' shouting gradually burns stronger and engulfs the entire orchestra. The music considered by Shostakovich as more important than this theme was the ending of the first movement, as a magnificent funeral march, the requiem or mourning of the dead,

with a bassoon lyrical solo. Despite the allusion to sinister enemy Nazi forces, the theme has a satirical undertone of scorn for the Stalin's regime. The composer started composing the second movement, which combines a scherzo and a lyric intermezzo, in the beginning of the city's siege and ended it in just two weeks, as if trying to show that life under those circumstances is more than possible. On the first day of October, Shostakovich was evacuated from Leningrad and completed the remainder of the symphony "in one breath" in exile. The third movement, structured much like the second, was conceived in three sections, with a faster middle section that evokes the first movement. The finale, originally named *Victory*, is by no means joyous, since the war was still on-going; instead, it brings faith in the final victory, which was yet to be won.

Danica Maksimović