

Belgrade Philharmonic
Season 2021-22
We Have Really Missed You

Friday, 3 December 2021

Leo McFall
Kian Soltani, violoncello

Hector Berlioz
Love scene from Romeo and Juliette

Duration: about 19 minutes

Claude Debussy
Pelléas and Mélisande, suite

Duration: around 25 minutes

Édouard Lalo
Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in D minor

Preludio. Lento – Allegro maestoso
Intermezzo. Andante con moto – Allegro presto
Rondo. Andante – Allegro vivace

Duration: around 26 minutes

Maurice Ravel
Bolero

Duration: around 13 minutes

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) had long been planning to write a choral symphony based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The original inspiration for composing such a work came when Berlioz attended the production of Hamlet with the beautiful Harriet Smithson in the role of Ophelia. In addition to being impressed by Shakespeare's work, the young actress completely fascinated him, and in the following years became his obsession. After his triumphant premiere of *Harold in Italy* in 1834, Berlioz received a commission from violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini to write a work with the following message: *Beethoven is dead, and only Berlioz can revive him*. Berlioz left his other projects and focused only on this piece. That is how *Romeo and Juliet*, a dramatic symphony for soloists, choir, and orchestra, was created.

Romeo and Juliet is a kind of homage to Shakespeare: the richness of his imagination, the huge range of feelings and moods, the diverse poetic invention and formal freedom. Drawing inspiration from Beethoven's way of using vocal and dramatic elements in a symphonic work, Berlioz decided to express the emotions of Romeo and Juliet with musical instruments, while dedicating the narrative elements to voices. Thus, this symphony is structurally divided into seven parts, with the focus on the orchestra. The vocals are used sporadically, and later with full force in the finale.

Berlioz dedicated the score to Paganini, who died before the first performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. The premiere at the Paris Conservatory, with 200 musicians on stage, was a great success, and this work is still considered one of the composer's most mature and successful achievements. Tonight we are listening to the *Love Scene* from this monumental symphony, which lasts 95 minutes in its integral version.

In his work on opera, French composer **Claude Debussy** (1862-1918) focused on clearly expressing his inner motives in relation to a historical event or physical action in a musical drama. He wrote to his patron Eugene Vasnier: *I would always prefer something in which, in some way, action would be sacrificed to the long-pursued expression of the feelings of the soul*.

Debussy found what he wanted at the performance of *Pelléas and Mélisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck in 1893. He made his first sketches for an opera on this subject immediately and after receiving permission from Maeterlinck to use this play, he made very few cuts. He worked

feverishly on his opera *Pelléas and Mélisande* for two years, and in the meantime he supported himself by playing Wagner's musical scores on the piano in private salons. One of the operas he performed was *Tristan and Isolde*, which greatly influenced Debussy and shared many common characteristics with *Pelléas*. In addition to a story based on love and betrayal, a similarity can also be found in the idiosyncratic treatment of leitmotifs. There are just as much difference, primarily in Debussy's use and treatment of the French language, but also in the revolutionary, psychologically expressive and structurally articulated use of silence in different contexts.

Debussy completed most of the score by mid-1895, and until its first performance at the Opéra Comique in Paris, there was great interest in it among French musicians. However, the composer was reluctant to allow the music to be heard outside the operatic context, as he felt that the understanding of the special role of silence, on which the work is based, would be lost. Only when the work was well received and established through 100 stage performances in Paris, Debussy began to think about segments that could be performed in concert. After his death, several orchestral adaptations were made, and on this occasion we will listen to the arrangement of French-Romanian composer Marius Constant.

Despite having written two operas, two ballets, three symphonies, and numerous chamber and vocal compositions, it was much later that **Édouard Lalo** (1823-1892) gained recognition for his creative work. The fame he desired came only after he wrote his Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in 1874, performed by the violin virtuoso and composer Pablo de Sarasate. In addition to this piece, compositions by Lalo that are featured in today's concert repertoires most often include the *Spanish Symphony* for Violin and Orchestra and his Concerto for Cello and Orchestra.

The **Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in D minor** was composed in 1876, in collaboration with Belgian cellist Adolphe Fischer, who performed as a soloist at the premiere. To this day, it remains a favorite among cellists. Although there is no explicit use of Spanish folklore in it as in other of works by Lalo, it also came from the same inspiration. In terms of style, the concert is close to German Romanticism, which in a sense brings it closer to the author's contemporary, César Franck.

Bolero, the most famous composition by **Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937) and one of the most popular works of classical music, was created in 1927. It was originally written as a ballet, and today it is performed as a simple orchestral work. Before the creation of *Bolero*, the composer wrote his greatest ballets (*Daphnis and Chloe*), ballet suites (orchestral version of *Mother Goose*) and one-piece dance music (*Waltz*). In addition to such compositions, which are intended for stage performance, Ravel also showed interest in composing restyled dances – from *Pavane* and *Minuet* from the earlier creative period, to more mature works, such as his suite for solo piano *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

Bolero is a reflection of Ravel's preoccupation with restyling dance movements and one of the last works he composed before disease forced him to retire. Two piano concertos and his song cycle *Don Quixote and Dulcinea* were the only compositions created after *Bolero*.

Bolero started as a piece commissioned by dancer Ida Rubinstein, who asked Ravel to make an orchestral transcription of piano pieces *Iberia* by Isaac Albéniz. After several reconsiderations and changes, Ravel decided to compose a completely new orchestral work, based on the Spanish bolero dance. The composition was performed with great success at the Paris Opera on November 22, 1928. Although Ravel thought that most orchestras would refuse to perform it, *Bolero* became one of his most frequently performed and most famous compositions. It is mainly played as an orchestral work and is very rarely staged as a ballet, and Ravel also prepared a version for two pianos.

In *Bolero* the music is built on an unchanging ostinato rhythm, above which one theme, divided into two sections of eighteen bars each, is repeated twice. The listener's attention is maintained by the constant re-orchestration of the theme, which brings a variety of timbres and a constant crescendo.

Asja Radonjić, M. Sc.