

Program Notes

By April L. Racana

Friday, January 15 The 872nd Suntory Hall Subscription Concert

Sunday, January 17 The 873rd Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Suntory Hall

1/15

Orchard Hall

1/17

Opera City

1/21

Aram Il'yich Khachaturian (1903-1978) “Gayane” Suite No. 1 (excerpts)

Dance of the Rose Maidens (ca. 2min)

Lullaby (ca. 5min)

Mountaineers' Dance (ca. 2min)

Lezghinka (ca. 3min)

Khachaturian was the son of an Armenian bookbinder who lived in the Georgian region of the former Soviet Union. In 1921, he went off to Moscow to enter college, but at the time music was only a side interest, studying cello privately. Eventually his musical skills would develop to the point where he entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1926, studying composition and remaining there until completing his graduate studies there in 1936, (the same year he debuted his Piano Concerto), and quickly becoming a rising star among composers of the region.

Gayane was the second of Khachaturian's three ballets, and was premiered in December of 1942, in the city of Perm where both the Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre of Leningrad had been evacuated after the Nazis entered Russia during World War II. The story in this ballet portrays life on a collective farm in Armenia, where people from various regions of the former Soviet Union are working and living together. The title character, Gayane, is an Armenian woman whose husband is eventually revealed as a traitor.

In 1943, Khachaturian began compiling three suites of music from the ballet. However, the suites themselves are often not performed as the composer had determined, with conductors arranging their own collection from the suites, and which usually features the most well known 'Sabre Dance' from the ballet's final act. Another familiar number from the suites is the 'Adagio' which was used in Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: A Space Odyssey.

The great variety of ethnic background in the workers living on the farm provides an opportunity for the composer to access a number of folk dance traditions in these suites, including Armenian, Kurdish, Georgian, Ukranian and Russian to highlight the music of each region. The composer's full score to the *Gayane* ballet would earn him the Stalin Prize, and keep him in the graces of the Stalinist regime due to its patriotic undertones. For this concert series the TPO will perform four numbers from Suite No. 1, including 'Dance of the Rose Maidens', 'Lullaby', 'Mountaineers' Dance', and 'Lezghinka'.

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, alto saxophone, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, gong, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, tubaphone, strings

Dmitry Dimitrievich Shostakovich (1906-1975) Symphony No.7 in C major, “Leningrad”, op. 60

- I. **Allegretto** (ca. 29min)
- II. **Moderato. Poco allegretto** (ca. 15min)
- III. **Adagio** (ca. 19min)
- IV. **Allegro non troppo** (ca. 19min)

It is known that Shostakovich encountered a great deal of pressure from the Stalinist regime during his lifetime as an artist in the former Soviet Union. He was criticized early in his professional life, which caused him to delay performance of his Fourth Symphony and begin work on a more ‘appropriate’ Fifth Symphony (1937). In the next decade Shostakovich worked carefully to appease the critics in the Stalinist regime and compose within expectations, even if only as a matter of self-preservation for himself and his family.

The Sixth Symphony was premiered during a “Festival of Soviet Music” in Moscow in November of 1939. In August of 1939, Shostakovich commented in the *Leningradskaya Pravda*:

“The moods and emotional tone of the Sixth Symphony will differ much from the Fifth, which was marked by elements of tragedy and tension. In my latest symphony, music of a contemplative, lyrical tenor predominates; I wished to convey moods of joy, spring, and youth.” There are conflicting accounts of when Shostakovich began his work on the Seventh Symphony. Initially, it was thought that he ‘officially’ began work during the summer of 1941 when the Germans invaded Russia in June of

that year. However, some scholars have found evidence that the composer had completed most, if not all of the first movement prior to that invasion.

Composed primarily in Leningrad, where the composer had been born, the Seventh Symphony would become Shostakovich’s longest work of the genre. During the Nazi invasion of the city, which lasted nearly 900 days, it is believed that at least a million lives were lost due to starvation, severe cold and the numerous air raids. The composer would choose to remain in the city, continuing work on the second and third movements through the rest of the summer of 1941. He (along with his family) were evacuated in the fall, so he would finish the final movement in December in Kuibyshev, in the Volga region. The entire work would premiere there in March 1942, where the composer’s ‘official’ comments indicated that the Seventh Symphony was “a composition...closer to my Fifth Symphony than to my Sixth; it is a continuation of the emotions and moods of the Fifth Symphony.”

According to a later interview recorded in Elizabeth Wilson Shostakovich’s “A Life Remembered”, the composer acknowledged that his “Leningrad” Symphony was conceived as a ‘work about the struggle against facism, but not just in its Nazi form.’ He was also quoted as saying “I have nothing against calling the Seventh the Leningrad, but it’s not about Leningrad under siege. It’s about the Leningrad that Stalin destroyed and

that Hitler merely finished off.” Later, Shostakovich amended his ‘official’ statement: “I dedicated my Seventh Symphony to our fight against facism, to our coming victory over the enemy and to my native city of Leningrad,” which was printed on the first page of the score as “Dedicated to the city of Leningrad.”

Initially, Shostakovich had given titles to each of the four movements: War, Memories, the Wide Spaces of Our Land, and Victory — however, he later decided not to use the sub-titles and instead left a few general notes about each: I. War breaks suddenly into our peaceful life. ... The recapitulation of a funeral march, a deeply tragic episode, a mass requiem. II. A lyrical intermezzo ...no program and fewer ‘concrete facts’ than in the first movement. III. A pathetic adagio with drama in the middle episode. IV. Victory, a beautiful life in the future.

After it’s premiere in Kuibyshev, the entire symphony was performed again in Moscow three weeks later. Eventually the score was secretly stored on microfilm and sent overseas to the United States, where it was performed by Toscanini in July 1942 in New York. In August, the Seventh Symphony would make its way back to Leningrad where it was performed in defiance over loudspeakers so that the German troops, who were stationed outside the city

borders, could hear it.

The opening of the first movement was described by the composer as follows: “This is the simple, peaceful life lived before the war.” However, during the development he indicated that “war bursts into the peaceful life of these people. I am not aiming for the naturalistic depiction of war... I am trying to convey the image of war emotionally.” He does this most effectively through the use of his ‘invasion theme’ that becomes a relentless march over the snare drum’s rhythm, that grows louder on each repeat.

The second and third movements provide an interlude to the action, featuring solos by the bass clarinet in the second, and flute over pizzicato strings in the third. The finale opens with the timpani roll and gradually builds to the brass and percussion victory fanfares in C-major. Shostakovich states: “My idea of victory isn’t something brutal. It’s better explained as the victory of light over darkness, humanity over barbarism, of reason over reaction.”

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (2nd doubling on alto flute, 3rd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling on E-flat clarinet), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 6 trumpets, 6 trombones, tuba, timpani, xylophone, snare drum 3, triangle, tambourine, tamtam, cymbals, bass drum, 2harps, piano, strings

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