

# Program Notes

By April L. Racana

**Sunday March 6, The 876th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert**  
**Monday March 7, The 877th Suntory Hall Subscription Concert**  
**Thursday March 10, The 100th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert**

Orchard Hall  
3/6

Suntory Hall  
3/7

Opera City  
3/10

**John Adams** (1947-)

## The Chairman dances; Foxtrot for Orchestra

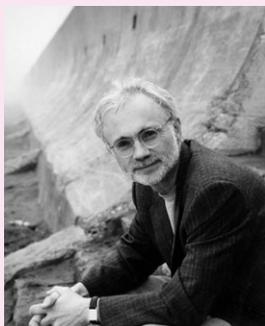
3/6 3/7

Commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts for the Milwaukee Symphony, John Adams had also been approached by director Peter Sellars to collaborate on an opera based on Richard Nixon's historic visit in 1972 to China to meet with Mao Zedong. These two events instigated Adams' writing of *The Chairman Dances*: the former to fulfill a commissioning that had previously been delayed and the latter giving him the 'pieces' to begin his work on the new opera. In his own words, Adams stated:

*"The Chairman Dances was an 'out-take' of Act III of Nixon in China. Neither an 'excerpt' nor a 'fantasy on themes from,' it was in fact a kind of warmup for embarking on the creation of the full opera."*

John Adams is an American composer and conductor known for developing his own particular style of minimalist compositions. He has composed in a variety of genre including operatic, symphonic, vocal, chamber and solo instrumental, as well as electronic works, with many works based on contemporary themes. Based in San Francisco, he began working with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in 1978, creating the "New and Unusual Music Series" together with the music director Edo de Waart. He was later appointed the SFSO's composer-in-residence, from 1982-1985, during which time he premiered his *Harmonium* and *Harmonielehre*.

It was during this period, in 1983, that Sellars had approached Adams about working with himself and librettist Alice Goodman on the opera *Nixon in China*. *The Chairman Dances* was premiered on January 31, 1986 by the Milwaukee Symphony with Lukas Foss conducting. The opera itself was premiered in October of 1987 by the Houston Grand Opera, with Act III highlighting some of the themes that had been used for his 'warmup' in *The Chairman Dances*. Adams based this 'foxtrot' on a scene sketched by Sellars and Goodman, though the scene was later altered in the final production of the opera:



John Adams  
©Christine Alicino

“Chiang Ch’ing, a.k.a. Madame Mao, has gate crashed the Presidential Banquet.... After a few minutes she... strips down to a cheongsam, skin-tight from neck to ankle.... She signals the orchestra to play and begins dancing by herself. Mao...steps down from his portrait on the wall, and they begin to foxtrot together...”

Adams, having discovered that Madame Mao had previously been an actress in films in Shanghai, incorporated themes that would musically highlight this part of her past as well, with a

wide range of dramatic moods. So this ‘foxtrot’ acts not only as an interruption to the formal festivities of the presidential exchange, but also stirs the memories of Mao Zedong and his bride in apparently happier times.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes (1st, 2nd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets (2nd doubling on bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, pedal bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbals, sizzle cymbals, high-hat cymbals, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, glockenspiel, xylophone, Vibraphone, antique cymbals, belltree, claves, castanets, sandpaper blocks, 2 woodblocks

the original eruption theme, and implying that although Tarkus was defeated, he may not have died. Later reflecting on the meaning of the work, Greg Lake commented that it was about “the futility of conflict... of soldiers and war.”

Takashi Yoshimatsu has composed many works in a variety of genres, making his debut in 1981 with *Threnody to Toki*. Over the years he has composed six symphonies, more than ten concertos for a variety of instruments, chamber music, and works for piano and guitar, as well as for traditional Japanese instruments. Yoshimatsu’s *Atom Hearts Club Suites for String Orchestra* pay homage to the

Beatles, Pink Floyd, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer. The orchestral arrangement of *Tarkus*, also paying homage to ELP, was first performed by the TPO in March of 2010 and again in 2013 with Keith Emerson in attendance for the performance.

**Instrumentation:** piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, suspended cymbals, (+splash, clash), hi-hat cymbals, triangles, brass wind chimes, antique cymbals, wood block, cow bells, tambourine, tomtoms(3-5), snare drum, bass drums (large..ord, small..muted), tamtam, marimba, vibraphone, tubular bells, piano, strings

## Keith Emerson (1944-) [arr.by TakashiYoshimatsu] "Tarkus"



- Eruption (ca. 3 min)
- Stones Of Years (ca. 3 min)
- Iconoclast (ca. 2 min)
- Mass (ca. 2 min)
- Manticore (ca. 2 min)
- Battlefield (ca. 3 min)
- Aquatarkus (ca. 5 min)

Composed as the title track for the progressive rock band Emerson, Lake & Palmer’s second album in 1971, *Tarkus* is presented in seven movements and based on an imaginary creature that is half armadillo and half tank. Keith Emerson was apparently inspired by the drummer Carl Palmer’s improvisations in a 10/8 rhythm backstage one day. Eventually incorporating both 5/4 and 10/8 meter, the various sections also explored ‘walls of sound’, which was inspired by one of Emerson’s ‘heroes’ John Coltrane, instead using electronics and the Moog synthesizer to create the effect.

The storyline is depicted artistically inside the album cover, with the creature

hatching during a volcanic eruption. The second section “Stones of the Years” originally had vocals and lyrics composed by Greg Lake, along with two other sections of the work. The remaining movements depict the various battles Tarkus wages with other imaginary creatures along the way. “Iconoclast” is depicted as a combination of a pterodactyl and a war plane. “Mass” was the second movement that also originally included vocals and lyrics, this time with a number of religious reflections, and presenting a creature which seems to be part lizard, part lobster and part rocket-launcher.

The final battle takes place with “Manticore”, a creature that appears to have a lion’s body together with a human face and a scorpion’s tail. Having won the first two battles, Tarkus apparently is defeated in this final battle, falling into a river. “Battlefield” (the third movement that originally had lyrics) and “Aquatarkus” close the work, incorporating a march theme as well as

## Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) Symphonic Dances op. 45



- I. Non allegro (ca. 11 min)
- II. Andante con moto (Tempo di valse) (ca. 10 min)
- III. Lento assai - Allegro vivace (ca. 14 min)

Originally titled *Fantastic Dances*, with subtitles for the three-movement work initially labelled as “Noon,” “Twilight,” and “Midnight,” this would be Rachmaninoff’s final composition. Composed during the summer of 1940, the composer first presented the work as a two-piano arrangement, eventually orchestrating it and dedicating it to Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra who would premiere the work in January of 1941. By the time of the premiere the original title and subtitles had vanished, but with some suggesting Rachmaninoff may have intended the three dances as a reflection of the various stages of his life. In addition, it was clear that the composer had intended



Sergei Rachmaninov

to collaborate with his good friend again, Michel Fokine (who had been choreographer for the Ballets Russes), when he approached him to ask him if he would be interested and was immediately given a strong reply of interest by Fokine. Unfortunately, Fokine’s death in 1942 kept the choreographic collaboration from bearing fruit this time.

The first movement *Non Allegro*, with its opening march, presents a contrasting middle section featuring a brief but beautiful saxophone melody, the

first time Rachmaninoff would use the instrument in one of his orchestral works, and for which he received support from the Broadway composer and arranger, Robert Russell Bennett. The coda turns to the strings to play a lush theme, which is taken from his First Symphony, with piano, harp and bells woven throughout. And although this First Symphony had not been successful so many years before, the composer seemed intent on revisiting the theme, perhaps reviving it in a new light or possibly just reflecting on earlier times.

The second movement, *Andante con moto*, is a whirling waltz, but more along the lines of a surreal dance in a fantastical dream state with a feeling of melancholy and mystery, rather than any traditional waltz. The final movement turns to the *Dies Irae* that Rachmaninoff had referenced many times before in earlier

works, but this time some believe he may have been contemplating the end of his own earthly life. With this theme taken up by the brass, the composer intones an Orthodox chant melody in the low strings and woodwinds, the same melody that had appeared in the composer's choral work, *All Night Vigil*, referencing the resurrection of Christ. In an expression of gratitude it seems, Rachmaninoff would write "I thank thee, Lord" on the final page of the manuscript, to complete the final work he would compose before his death.

**Instrumentation:** piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, alto saxophone, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangles, tambourine, tamtam, glockenspiel, chimes, piano, strings

terribly boring and repulsive to me... I can tell you... that I am displeased with the piece."

Whether his disappointment in the work was due to lingering self-doubts or simply his own critical ear, is difficult to know. But perhaps due to his former Moscow Conservatory teacher, Alexander Ziloti, taking the proverbial bull by the horn and deciding to have the composer premiere this new work (without his initial consent) in St. Petersburg, Rachmaninoff persevered and completed the work, directing the premiere on February 9, 1908. This and subsequent performances in Moscow and Warsaw were received warmly and reaffirmed the composer's abilities to create exceptional orchestral works, even receiving another Glinka Award later that year.

The four movements follow traditional Romantic Russian symphonic form with the *Scherzo* following the first movement and the lyrical slow movement (*Adagio*) preceding the final movement. The work takes the listener through a wide range of dramatic moods, from the

dark, mysterious opening motive in the low strings that winds its way through calming and even soaring melodic lines. Even the ancient chant for the dead, the *Dies irae*, that Rachmaninoff was to use in a number of his works, can be heard initially in the brass chorale at the close of the *Scherzo* movement, and is referred to in subsequent movements.

Eventually, Rachmaninoff would work with conductor Nikolai Sokoloff to make significant cuts to the work, with the idea that it was otherwise too lengthy for most conductors to program. These cuts eliminated nearly one third of the entire work, the revised version being performed by conductors for many years. But eventually the full 'uncut' version was brought back into favour and is now more frequently performed, as will be presented by the TPO for this concert series.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes(3rd doubling on piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling on English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, glockenspiel, strings

## Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) Symphony No. 2 in E minor op. 27



- I. **Largo - Allegro moderato** (ca. 20 min)
- II. **Allegro molto** (ca. 11 min)
- III. **Adagio** (ca. 14 min)
- IV. **Allegro vivace** (ca. 15 min)

Following his first attempt at writing in the symphonic genre, Rachmaninoff's *Symphony No. 1* was received with such strong criticism that it put the composer off from composing any works at all for several years. In fact it took the assistance of a specialist, Dr. Nikolay Dahl, and post-hypnotic suggestion for the composer to regain enough self-confidence to try his hand at composing again. His *Piano Concerto No. 2* (1901) was his first attempt at writing again and was a great success, even receiving the Glinka Award in 1904.

However, it would be another two years before the composer would begin to pen his Second Symphony. In 1906, Rachmaninoff made the decision to relocate with his family to Dresden to concentrate his efforts on composing. It was there that he began to write his next symphony. In the summers he would return to the family estate, Ivanovka, and continue work throughout most of 1907. He was not satisfied with the results as he stated in response to inquiries about his latest work:

"...I really did finish a symphony, but to this must be added the phrase 'in rough draft.' I have not announced it to the world because I want first to complete it in final form. While I was planning the orchestration, the work became

April L. Racana / Music Specialist at Nishimachi International School where she has taught since 1992. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana (BS/Piano Pedagogy) and her graduate studies at San Francisco State University (MA/Music).