

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

Fri. May 19, The 109th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

Sun. May 21, The 892nd Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Dances from Act III of “Otello” (ca. 6 min)

Otello is an opera in four acts based on Shakespeare's play Othello. When it was performed in Paris in October of 1894, Verdi felt obligated to provide additional ballet music to the work, according to the tradition of the times. He placed the ballet in the Third Act when Iago brings Desdemona to meet the ambassadors. The music is divided into seven brief sections, opening with a fanfare in the horns and continuing immediately to the second section, *Arabian Song*.

Verdi included a detailed description when he sent the original score to his publisher, Ricordi:

“Look at the splendid, colonnaded scene of the Third Act. I decided to make the music go as follows: At the very beginning, to the sound of horns, a group of Turkish slave-girls dance with reluctance and ill-humor because of the very fact they are slaves. Then, hearing the strains of the Arab Song, they grow livelier and at the end dance quite wildly... At the Invocation to Allah, they all fall to the ground... Just then a group of beautiful Greek girls appear among the columns, and four measures later another similar group; ... these two groups join in a quiet, aristocratic, classical dance. The next motif is that of La Muranese (*allegro vivace* 6/8), which heralds the appearance of a “group” of Venetians... Later, another group of Venetians enters and at the... *fortissimo* these two groups meet and dance at the front of the stage. After the fortissimo there is a passage of very light music in F sharp, which should be danced by couples. This motif is repeated, louder, and then all the Venetians dance together. The 6/8 motif reappears, and here... another group of Venetians comes forward. The War Song should be danced by men alone. At the recurrence of the first motif, all the Venetians dance again, then... the Venetians, Turks, Greeks, and all the rest all dance together...”

In addition, the composer had indicated that he had used ancient sources of music from Italy and Greece as inspiration for the dances, but ultimately felt they interrupted the action of the opera, describing the music as “artistically speaking... a monstrosity.” Yet these dances are sometimes performed, as for this concert series, as a separate concert piece.

Work composed: 1887 **World premiere:** 1887, Teatro alla Scala, Milan.

Paris production premiere: 1894, l'Opera – Palais Garnier, Paris

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 cornets, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, cimbasso, timpani, percussion (cymbals, tam-tam, bass drum), 2 harps, strings

Riccardo Zandonai (1883-1944): *Episodio Sinfonico*

Torch Dance and Cavalcade, from “Juliet and Romeo” (ca. 9 min)

Originally titled in Italian as *Danza del torchio e cavalcata*, the pieces are taken from Zandonai's opera, *Giulietta e Romeo*, written in 1921 and based on the Shakespeare play. The composer, though not as well-known outside of Italy, is most renowned for his opera *Francesco da Rimini* composed more than a decade earlier. Zandonai was born in Borgo Sacco, Rovereto, which was part of Austria-Hungary at the time. He showed musical promise at a very young age, entering the Pesaro Conservatorio in 1899 and completing what was usually a nine-year program in only three years.

At an event in Milan in 1908, Zandonai was introduced to Giulio Ricordi, one of the top publishing figures in Italy at the time. It was Ricordi who eventually pronounced the composer as Puccini's ‘heir’, even recommending that he be chosen to complete *Turandot* when Puccini died before being able to complete the last act himself. Zandonai became the director of the Rossini Conservatory in 1935 where he remained until his death.

Zandonai's opera "*Giulietta e Romeo*" premiered in Rome at the Teatro Costanzi on February 14, 1922. Not surprisingly, influences from Puccini can be heard. Some scholars also attribute influences by some 20th century composers as well, including Strauss for his orchestrations and Debussy with his whole-tone scales.

The Torch Dance is taken from Act 2, Scene 1 of the opera with full brass blazing, while the Cavalcade is taken from the first scene of Act 3, the closing act of the opera. These two works are illustrative of the composer's ability to build the orchestral music to a strong intensity to highlight the dramatic emotions of the scene taking place on the stage.

Work composed: 1922 **World premiere:** 1922, Teatro Costanzi, Roma

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes (2nd doubling on English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, bass trombone(cimbasso), timpani, percussion (bass drum, snare drum, tambourine, tam-tam, cymbals, triangle, glockenspiel), celesta, harp, piano, strings

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

The Rite of Spring (ca. 33 min)

“I saw in my imagination a solemn pagan rite: sage elders, seated in a circle, watched a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring.” This was Stravinsky’s vision that apparently came to him while he was completing his work on *The Firebird* in the spring of 1910. He shared his vision with the director of the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev, who encouraged him to continue developing his ideas, just as he had in their previous work together. During the summer of 1910, Stravinsky collaborated with the Russian painter and set designer, Nikolai Roerich, who also had a background in archeology and together they planned the entire scenario for the production. However, Stravinsky hadn’t envisioned the reaction that was to come at the premiere.

After being sidetracked by his work on *Petrushka* Stravinsky began work in earnest to write the score for this new ‘vision’ in the fall of 1911. Completing Part 1 in January of 1912, he played through the score on the piano for the conductor, Pierre Monteux who afterwards stated: “I was convinced he was raving mad.” He continued working primarily at the piano, writing a four-hand arrangement that he and Debussy performed in June of 1912 at a party, which was received once again with surprise and shock. Finally in the fall of 1912 the score was completed, where it was then taken into rehearsals for six months, challenging not only the musicians in the orchestra, but also the dancers on the stage to master the fantastical polyrhythmic, polytonal, and extreme timbral ranges and dissonances throughout.

On May 29th, 1913, *The Rite of Spring* premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The audience had previously seen and heard *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* and in no way expected the changes that were to come either in the music or in the dance, nor even in the unusual storyline. Stravinsky had been received warmly up until that point in Paris, for his previous collaborations with the Ballets Russes and Diaghilev. Nijinsky was making his debut as a choreographer and both the music and dance were not in the traditional lush nationalistic style the audience had come to expect. As the story goes, as soon as the curtain was raised and the dancers were seen in their unusual positions to match the dissonances and off beat rhythms in the music, the infamous riot ensued, with Diaghilev backstage flashing the houselights trying to settle the audience and Nijinsky shouting out numbers to the dancers to try to keep them in time with the music that they could hardly hear over all the cacophony from the crowd.

Stravinsky had marked a turning point in the history of music with this piece, which focused on the primeval rhythmic urges found in the folk traditions of the pagan rituals. He tested the limits of the orchestral timbres to express these sounds, extending not only the number and types instruments included in each section, but especially challenging the ultimate range of each, most famously the opening strains of the high bassoon. With the emphasis on the pervasive polytonality and persistent polyrhythmic passages as well as irregular meters, the

melody couldn’t help but to take a back seat. The combination of all of these effects with such a huge ensemble, together with the unexpected storyline and primordial urges expressed in the dancers’ undulating movements, caused not only a riot at the premier but stirred the arts in a way that has had far-reaching effects ever since and continues to stir audiences to this day, (albeit without a riot ensuing!).

Work composed: 1911-1913 **World premiere:** 1913, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris
Instrumentation: 3 flutes (3rd doubling on 2nd piccolo), piccolo, alto flute, 4 oboes (4th doubling on 2nd English horn), English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling on 2nd bass clarinet), piccolo clarinet [Es, D], 4 bassoons (4th doubling on 2nd contrabassoon), contrabassoon, 8 horns (7th, 8th doubling on tenor tuba), 4 trumpets, piccolo trumpet, bass trumpet, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani (2 players), percussion (triangle, antique cymbals, cymbals, tam-tam, guiro, tambourine, bass drum), strings

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), as well as a post-graduate fellowship at Northwestern University, and the Japan Studies Program at International Christian University.

May 19
May 21

Next Subscription Concerts in June

June 14, Wed 19:00 start at Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall

The 110th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

June 18, Sun 15:00 start at Bunkamura Orchard Hall

The 893rd Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Conductor Kazumasa Watanabe
 Piano Tomoki Sakata*
 (2016 International Franz Liszt Piano Competition winner)



Kazumasa Watanabe
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Liszt: Symphonic Poem "Les preludes"
 Liszt: Piano Concerto No. 1*
 Brahms: Symphony No. 4



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