Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2023-2024 Grand Classics Series

January 12, 13 and 14, 2024

PETR POPELKA, CONDUCTOR
YULIANNA AVDEEVA, PIANO

Bohuslav Martinů — Thunderbolt P-47

Sergei Prokofiev — Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra in C major, Op. 26
- I. Andante — Allegro
- II. Theme and Variations: Andantino
- III. Allegro ma non troppo

Ms. Avdeeva

Intermission

Modeste Mussorgsky, arr. Maurice Ravel — *Pictures at an Exhibition*
- Introduction: Promenade
- I. Gnomus (The Gnome)
- II. Il vecchio castello (The Old Castle)
- III. Tulleries
- IV. Bydlo
- V. Ballet of Little Chicks in their Shells
- VI. Two Polish Jews
- VII. Limoges
- VIII. Catacombae (Catacombs) - Cum mortius in lingua mortua (With the dead in a dead language)
- IX. Baba-Yaga - The Hut on Hen's Legs
- X. The Great Gate of Kiev

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ
Thunderbolt P-47 (1945)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER
- Born December 8, 1890 in Polička, Czechoslovakia; died August 28, 1959 in Liestal, Switzerland

PREMIERE OF WORK
- December 19, 1945 in Washington D.C., conducted by Hans Kindler

PSO PREMIERE
- These performances mark the PSO premiere

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE
- These performances mark the PSO premiere

INSTRUMENTATION
- Piccolo, 2 flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings

DURATION
- 11 minutes

Bohuslav Martinů was born in the Czech village of Polička in the church tower where his father was watchman and keeper. As a boy, Bohuslav took violin lessons, but his real interest was in composition, and he started composing at age ten, studying first at the Prague Conservatory (from 1906 until 1910) and then privately with Josef Suk before winning a small scholarship that enabled him to settle in Paris in the summer of 1923. Martinů lived there in great poverty for seventeen years, but he was invigorated by the heady artistic atmosphere of the French capital. One of the surprising results of his Parisian residence was a new-found interest in the music of his homeland — ironically, it was only when Martinů left Czechoslovakia that he became a nationalist composer. Blacklisted by the Nazis, he fled from Paris in June 1940, and emigrated to America the following year. Though his popularity and the demand for new works spread quickly in the New World, Martinů's heart remained in Czechoslovakia. An invitation to teach at the Prague Conservatory came after World War II, but he was unable to accept it because of the establishment of the communist regime in 1947. Instead, he took a summer teaching post at Tanglewood, and joined the music faculty of Princeton University the following year. He left that post in 1953 and moved to Nice for two years, but returned in 1955 to teach at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. The following year he accepted a faculty position at the American Academy in Rome. He died in Liestal, Switzerland in 1959.

Hans Kindler was one of the most brilliant and dedicated musicians of his generation. Born in Rotterdam in 1892 and trained at the city's conservatory, Kindler emigrated to the United States in 1914 to become Principal Cellist of the Philadelphia Orchestra. After serving in that distinguished ensemble for six years, he followed a solo career until choosing in 1927 to devote himself to conducting; the following year he led the premiere of Stravinsky's ballet *Apollon Musagète* in Washington, D.C. Realizing that the nation's capital did not have an adequate permanent orchestra, four years later, at the height of the Great Depression, he founded the National Symphony Orchestra. The venture was a success, and Kindler became an influential advocate of contemporary composers during his seventeen years as the ensemble's music director.

Early in 1945, when World War II was entering the final phase of its exhausting course, Kindler commissioned Bohuslav Martinů to write a work for the NSO. He could only offer $200 (of his own money) for the job, however, so a short, one-movement piece was agreed upon. Martinů chose to write a high-energy scherzo for Kindler and completed the score during the first two weeks of September ("lots of work for little money," he grumbled to a friend). He titled the piece *Thunderbolt P-47*, a tribute to both the pilots of the U.S. Air Force and to Republic

Aviation's eponymous plane, America's largest, heaviest, most expensive, most durable and most effective single-engine fighter-bomber of World War II. Martinů's *Thunderbolt P-47* follows the traditional tripartite form of the scherzo (A–B–A), though its style embodies a decidedly modern musical evocation of the speed and power of military aviation: the muscular outer sections are driven by strong, repetitive rhythms and full scoring, while the central episode is rather dance-like in mood and lighter in texture.

SERGEI PROKOFIEV
Concerto No. 3 in C major for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 26 (1921)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER
- Born April 23, 1891 in Sontzovka, Russia; died March 5, 1953 in Moscow, Russia

PREMIERE OF WORK
- December 16, 1921 in Chicago; Frederick Stock, conductor; Sergei Prokofiev, soloist

PSO PREMIERE
- March 24, 1944; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor; Beveridge Webster, soloist

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE
- June 2, 2019; Heinz Hall; Pietari Inkinen, conductor; Beatrice Rana, soloist

INSTRUMENTATION
- Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, and strings

DURATION
- 28 minutes

In a 1962 interview, Madame Lina Llubera Prokofiev, the composer's first wife, recalled her husband's working method at the time he wrote the C major Piano Concerto: "Prokofiev toiled at his music. His capacity for work was phenomenal. He would sit down to work in the morning 'with a clear head,' as he said, either at the piano or at his writing desk. He usually composed his major works in the summer, in the mountains or at the seaside, away from the turmoil of city life. Always he sought places where the rhythm of work was not interrupted, where he could rest and take long walks. So it was with the Third Piano Concerto, which he completed during the summer of 1921 while staying at St. Brévin-les-Pins, a small village on the Atlantic coast of Brittany in France."

The composition of this Concerto was not a sudden inspiration for Prokofiev. The plan for a large virtuoso work to follow the first two piano concertos emerged in 1911, but he made little progress on it except for one passage he eventually placed at the end of the first movement. By 1913, he recalled in his memoirs, "I had composed a theme for variations, which I kept for a long time for subsequent use. In 1916-1917, I had tried several times to return to the Third Concerto. I wrote a beginning for it (two themes) and two variations on the theme for the second movement." At that time, he was also working on what he called a "white" quartet (i.e., in a diatonic style, playable on the white keys of the piano) but abandoned it because he thought the result would be monotonous. He shuttled two themes from that aborted quartet into the Concerto. "Thus," he continued in his autobiography, "when I began [in 1921] working on the Third Concerto, I already had the entire thematic material with the exception of the subordinate theme of the first movement and the third theme of the finale."

Prokofiev provided the following description of the score: "The first movement opens quietly with a short introduction. The theme is announced by an unaccompanied clarinet and is continued by the violins for a few bars. Soon the tempo changes to *Allegro*, and the strings lead to the statement of the principal subject by the piano. Discussion of this theme is carried on in a lively manner, both the piano and the orchestra having a good deal to say on the matter. A passage in chords for the piano alone leads to the more expressive second subject, which is heard in the oboe with a pizzicato accompaniment. The second movement consists of a theme with five variations. The finale begins with a staccato theme for bassoons and pizzicato strings, which is interrupted by the blustering entry of the piano. The orchestra holds its own with the

opening theme, however, and there is a good deal of argument, with frequent differences of opinion as regards key. Eventually the piano takes up the first theme and develops it to a climax. With a reduction of tone and a slackening of tempo, an alternative theme is introduced in the woodwinds. The piano replies with a theme that is more in keeping with the caustic humor of the work. This material is developed, and there is a brilliant coda."

MODEST MUSSORGSKY
Pictures at an Exhibition (1874)
Transcribed for Orchestra (1923) by Maurice Ravel

ABOUT THE COMPOSER
- Born March 21, 1839 in Karevo, Pskov District, Russia; died March 28, 1881 in St. Petersburg, Russia

PREMIERE OF WORK
- May 3, 1923 in Paris; Sergei Koussevitzky, conductor;

PSO PREMIERE
- December 8, 1939; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE
- April 2, 2017; Heinz Hall; Lionel Bringuier, conductor

INSTRUMENTATION
- Three flutes, three oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, two bassoons, contrabassoon four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, celeste and strings

DURATION
- 34 minutes

In the years around 1850, with the spirit of nationalism sweeping across Europe, several young Russian artists banded together to rid their art of foreign influences in order to establish a distinctive nationalist character for their works. Leading this movement was a group of composers known as "The Five," whose members included Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, César Cui and Mily Balakirev. Among the allies that The Five found in other fields was the artist and architect Victor Hartmann, with whom Mussorgsky became close personal friends. Hartmann's premature death at 39 stunned the composer and the entire Russian artistic community. Vladimir Stassov, a noted critic and the journalistic champion of the Russian arts movement, organized a memorial exhibit of Hartmann's work in February 1874, and it was under the inspiration of that showing that Mussorgsky conceived his *Pictures at an Exhibition* for piano.

At the time of the exhibit, Mussorgsky was engaged in preparations for the first public performance of his opera *Boris Godunov*, and he was unable to devote any time to his *Pictures* until early summer. When he took up the piece in June, he worked with unaccustomed speed. "'Hartmann' is bubbling over, just as *Boris* did," he wrote to a friend. "Ideas, melodies come to me of their own accord, like a banquet of music — I gorge and gorge and overeat myself. I can hardly manage to put them down on paper fast enough." The movements mostly depict sketches, watercolors and architectural designs shown publicly at the Hartmann exhibit, though Mussorgsky based two or three sections on canvases he had been shown privately by the artist before his death. The composer linked his sketches together with a musical "*Promenade*" in which he depicted his own rotund self shuffling — in an uneven meter — from one picture to the next. Though Mussorgsky was not given to much excitement over his own creations, he took special delight in this one. Especially in the masterful transcription for orchestra that Maurice Ravel did in 1922 for the Parisian concerts of conductor Sergei Koussevitzky, it is a work of vivid impact to which listeners and performers alike can return with undiminished pleasure.

Promenade. According to Stassov, this recurring section depicts Mussorgsky "roving through the exhibition, now leisurely, now briskly in order to come close to a picture that had attracted his attention, and, at times sadly, thinking of his friend."

The Gnome. Hartmann's drawing is for a fantastic wooden nutcracker representing a gnome who gives off savage shrieks while he waddles about on short, bandy legs.

Promenade — The Old Castle. A troubadour (represented by the saxophone) sings a doleful lament before a foreboding, ruined ancient fortress.

Promenade — Tuileries. Mussorgsky's subtitle is "Dispute of the Children after Play." Hartmann's picture shows a corner of the famous Parisian garden filled with nursemaids and their youthful charges.

Bydlo. Hartmann's picture depicts a rugged wagon drawn by oxen. The peasant driver sings a plaintive melody (solo tuba) heard first from afar, then close-by, before the cart passes away into the distance.

Promenade — Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells. Hartmann's costume design for the 1871 fantasy ballet *Trilby* shows dancers enclosed in enormous egg shells, with only their arms, legs and heads protruding.

Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle. The title was given to the music by Stassov. Mussorgsky originally called this movement "Two Jews: one rich, the other poor." It was inspired by a pair of pictures Hartmann presented to the composer showing two residents of the Warsaw ghetto, one rich and pompous (a weighty unison for strings and winds), the other poor and complaining (muted trumpet). Mussorgsky based both themes on incantations he had heard on visits to Jewish synagogues.

The Marketplace at Limoges. A lively sketch of a bustling market, with animated conversations flying among the female vendors.

Catacombs, Roman Tombs. Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua. Hartmann's drawing shows him being led by a guide with a lantern through cavernous underground tombs. The movement's second section, bearing the title "With the Dead in a Dead Language," is a mysterious transformation of the *Promenade* theme.

The Hut on Fowl's Legs. Hartmann's sketch is a design for an elaborate clock suggested by Baba Yaga, the fearsome witch of Russian folklore who eats human bones she has ground into paste with her mortar and pestle. She also can fly through the air on her fantastic mortar, and Mussorgsky's music suggests a wild, midnight ride.

The Great Gate of Kiev. Mussorgsky's grand conclusion to his suite was inspired by Hartmann's plan for a gateway for the city of Kiev in the massive old Russian style crowned with a cupola in the shape of a Slavic warrior's helmet. The majestic music suggests both the imposing bulk of the edifice (never built) and a brilliant procession passing through its arches. The work ends with a heroic statement of the *Promenade* theme and a jubilant pealing of the great bells of the city.