

# Program Notes

by Edward Yadzinsky

The harp: Lucent, lithe and luxurious tuned and tempered for music of all ages. In fact, the evolution of the harp traces far back into world history. It has an abundant iconography among artifacts, sculptures and paintings of the greatest antiquity, including a trove of ancient instruments in museums around the globe. Even the development of language has had a close encounter with the harp, e.g., the term “lyrical” itself derives from the root formation of “lyre,” one of the oldest types of small hand harps.

When we speak of the harp today we refer to the tall, curvaceous open-stringed instrument found on the concert stage. And like all orchestral instruments, the harp underwent centuries of discovery and experimentation. By the early 19th century, the Parisian firm of Erard (who built pianos for Chopin and Liszt) came up with a design comprising a full-sized frame, a resonant sound box, pedals and 43 strings. That same system prevails today, although advances in metallurgy and tooling have enabled a few refinements, like the addition of 4 strings (47 in all) and a robust construction overall.

## Overture to The Magic Harp, D. 644 (Die Zauberharfe)

*Franz Schubert*

*Born January 31, 1797; near Vienna, Austria*

*Died November 19, 1828; Vienna*



His life was impoverished, wrought with difficulty and tragically short. But Franz Schubert possessed a Promethean gift for music and song, and he never skipped a beat when it came to sharing his wealth. Whether composing art songs, masses, symphonies or chamber music, melodic bouquets flowed from his pen like showers over a rain forest. His full catalog also contains a variety of other forms, a fine example of which is the suite of incidental music to a play titled *The Magic Harp*, written in 1820. The similarity in title and theme to Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* was no coincidence, in that Schubert’s new offering was premiered in the famous theater An der Wien (Vienna) which had presented hundreds of performances of Mozart’s masterpiece. But by a curious interplay of theater tradition, the *Overture to the Magic Harp* of 1820 is today also known as the *Overture to Rosamunde*, for which Schubert composed incidental music in 1823, but without the required overture.

For reference, there is a lot of “incidental music” in the symphonic repertoire, e.g., Mendelssohn’s music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Shakespeare), Sibelius’ lovely score for *Pelleas and Melisande* (Maeterlinck), Grieg’s settings for *Peer Gynt* (Ibsen), Bizet’s *L’Arlésienne* (Daudet) et al, one could easily fill a concert season with music for the theater.

Getting back to the *The Magic Harp*, the storyline of the play by Georg von Hoffman is a notebook of tender clichés and allegorical motifs, all in the popular mode of the time.

The storyline in sum: the queen-sorceress Melinde, Queen of the Stars, has called on the Spirits of Fire to put a spell on her son, Palmerin, intending to protect his innocence forever. As a handsome young man, he is known as Palmerin the Troubador. But sadly, his mother’s enchantment allows him to communicate only in song, accompanied by his magic harp. But when Palmerin uses the sound of his harp to entrance the lovely Ida and save her from a royal seducer, true love frees him from the spell. The new lovers enter the realm of happily-ever-after, escorted by the Knights of the Roundtable. Whew!

As for the music of the overture, it is cast in the so-called sonata-allegro form: in this case a slow introduction, bright first and second themes from the incidental music to follow, a brief but delightful development and a deft recapitulation near the close. Note the woodwind-string bantering about midway in a quasi-Viennese galop that has some parallel to the style of Rossini. Marvelous.

### **Events of 1820** (*The Magic Harp* composed)

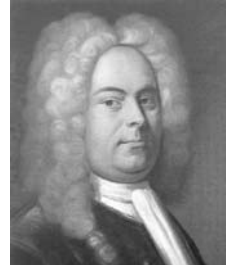
- Michigan Governor Cass and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft set off to explore Lake Superior
- Maine admitted as a state
- President Monroe reelected
- Magnetic fields defined by Ampère
- Indiana University founded
- *Ode on a Grecian Urn* written by Keats
- *Prometheus Unbound* written by Shelley
- William Blake illustrates *Book of Job*
- Johnny Walker scotch introduced
- U.S. population reaches 9.6 million

## Concerto for Harp in B-flat major, Op. 4, No. 6

George Frideric Handel

Born February 23, 1685; Halle, Germany

Died April 14, 1759; London, England



Born and trained in Germany, George Frideric Handel began his lifelong assimilation of English culture by his 22nd year. From very early on he enjoyed popular support as well as the patronage of British royalty. It was a time (the late Baroque) when musicians, painters, writers, philosophers and scientists began to travel extensively across all of Europe as the spirit of the Enlightenment beamed at high noon. For Handel, the Age was a catalyst for his cosmopolitan and eclectic nature. He was free to draw at will from German, French, Italian and English traditions. And, in the best sense of the term, he became a humanist who preferred to compose theater music and other entertaining forms. However, Handel's full catalog is a wealth of instrumental works including many concertos, orchestral suites and overtures, myriad sonatas and various works for organ and harpsichord, art songs, etc.

George Frideric also became a virtuoso organist and composed volumes of music for his own use as a performer, including a series of twelve concertos for organ. He often played them as entertainments between the acts and scenes of his new oratorios. And although the current *Concerto in B-flat* was most likely premiered at such a venue, the title page reveals that it was intended as a concerto for lute and harp. In fact, the work was first performed in that combination in 1736 as interludes between the acts of Handel's oratorio *The Power of Musik* (a.k.a. *Alexander's Feast*). In turn, avid harpists adapted the work as a formal concerto for harp, strings and two flutes, which is the version best known today. Given the diminutive sound of the Baroque harp, it is likely that Handel selected the key of B-flat to avoid the extra resonance produced by the open strings in the string choir.

The *Harp Concerto* begins straight away with Handel's well-known motif – a bright and charming fragment which is taken up at once by the soloist. Airy and light throughout, the solo line offers several variations on the main theme along the way. Set in G minor, the second movement *Larghetto* conjures a wordless poem, via lovely lyrics in the solo harp. Or perhaps Handel's intent was to present a solemn, courtly dance in slow triple time, complete with Italian intonations.

Marked *Allegro moderato*, the third movement returns to B-flat major, and recaptures the concerto's opening energy, with attractive ornamentation on the wing for the harp. Intricate counterpoint likewise offers a daunting challenge for the soloist, clear to the modest close which comes too soon.

## Events of 1736 (*Harp Concerto* composed)

- Euler writes tome on *Mechanics*
- Freemasonry banned by Pope Clement
- Burning witches banned in Britain
- First successful appendectomy performed
- *The Good Samaritan* painted by William Hogarth
- *Alzire (Les Americains)* written by Voltaire
- Opera *Atlanta* written by G.F. Handel

## Danse sacrée et Danse profane (for Harp and Strings)

*Claude Debussy*

*Born August 22, 1862; Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France*

*Died March 25, 1918; Paris*



Claude Debussy was a relatively late-bloomer who came to maturity in the last two decades of the 19th century, just as the traditions of music, painting and literature began to spin in quasi-revolution. But with regard to formal training, he was well-practiced in the music of the late Renaissance through Tchaikovsky, and became a very fine pianist in the classical mold, having studied with a celebrated pupil of Chopin. But Debussy also took the trouble to stay up-to-date with musical trends. For example, he met Johannes Brahms and admired his scores, and made it a point to show up regularly at Bayreuth for the operas of Richard Wagner.

But for his part, Debussy was truly an exponent of his own turf and time, immersed in the freedoms of Symbolist poets like Verlaine, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, and fascinated by the stories and poetry of Edgar Allen Poe. Likewise, he felt a kinship with the canvases of the English Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Impressionist work of Claude Monet and the later works of J.M.W. Turner.

With regard to Debussy's *Danse sacrée et Danse profane*, let us first check the title in translation: *Sacred Dance and Secular Dance*. The little catch is the term profane, which in French does not at all carry a sinister meaning as the word does in English. Completed in 1904, the work was commissioned to showcase the new "chromatic harp" by the Pleyel company in Paris. However, because of the overly complex system of strings, the instrument was eventually eclipsed by the conventional 47-string harp we have today.

In his conception for the piece, Debussy was well aware that the broad history of the harp passed through the Hellenic Age in Greece. In turn, the

early harp was adopted by the musicians and poets of ancient Rome, then exported across Europe with the expansion of the Empire.

Reflecting this antique heritage, the music of *Danse sacrée* (*Sacred Dance*) begins with a five-tone Gregorian chant (using the well-traveled “pentatonic” scale of the Pythagoreans from about 600 B.C.) after which Debussy colors the intervals with his lush harmonic palette. But we should also note the oriental intonations which follow, offering a quaint, almost spiritual ambiance to the movement overall, with ethereal glimmers from the harp.

Without pause, *Danse profane* (*Secular Dance*) emerges in 3/4 time – in reality a gentle waltz. With intrigue at every phrase, the alluring timbres glide like moonlit reflections on a flowing stream, but in perfect rhymes and rhythms in triple time – exquisite tonal imagery.

At a few precise moments along the way, a subtle reality will strike listeners who know Ravel’s *La valse* of 1920, i.e., the latter was surely influenced by this score. If imitation is flattery, then inspiration must be reverence – from a work titled profane! By the way, Manuel de Falla also noted that *Danse profane* contained a souvenir from an old Spanish folk tune. Small world.

#### Events of 1904 (*Danses sacrée et profane* composed)

- Salt mining begins in Detroit Rock Salt Company near River Rouge
- Adding machine manufacture begins in Detroit, incorporated as Burroughs in 1905
- President Roosevelt wins election
- Marie Curie discovers radium
- New York subway opens in Manhattan
- Cadillac introduced in Detroit
- Helen Keller graduates magna cum laude from Radcliffe
- *The Sea Wolf* written by Jack London
- *Madame Butterfly* premiered at Milan
- Ice cream cone introduced at St. Louis Fair
- Tea bags pioneered in New York

### Suite No. 3 in G major, op. 55

*Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*

*Born April 25, 1840; Votkinsk, Russia*

*Died October 25, 1893, St. Petersburg*



On April 16, 1884, Tchaikovsky wrote in his diary: “...tried to lay the foundation of a new symphony both in the Trostyanka forest, and at home later in the afternoon, but I am still dissatisfied. After strolling in the garden I sowed

the seeds not of a future symphony but of a suite for orchestra.” And after completing the new score on May 23, Peter Ilyich wrote to his publisher: “A work of greater genius than the new Suite has never been scored!!! My opinion of the newborn composition is so optimistic: God knows what I shall think of it a year from now.” In turn he noted to a friend: “I wanted to compose a Symphony. However, the title is of no consequence.”

That last line from the composer reveals, at least in his view, that musical forms like sonata, concerto, symphony, suite and even tone poem might all be somehow more alike than different. For example, an early gambit from Hector Berlioz was a tone poem (really a suite of five movements) disguised as the *Symphonie fantastique*, and Schumann and even Mendelssohn had often expressed storylines for their symphonic works. In fact, a symphony itself is really just a sonata for orchestra, and a suite is nothing more than a collection of complementary movements. To this we note that Tchaikovsky had an affinity for ballet – his own *Swan Lake* of eight years prior would soon be followed by *Sleeping Beauty* and the *Nutcracker*. In fact, the last movement of *Suite No. 3* is quite familiar because of its popularity with ballet companies around the world.

Luminous and rich with earth tones, the tenor of the first movement of Op. 55 is unexpected given Tchaikovsky’s elegiac title. Moreover, the harmonic flow conveys a memoir that is tranquil rather than tragic. The heartfelt mode continues in the *Valse mélancolique*, right from the soul of the composer’s métier. Surely no one could do more with 3/4 time than Peter Ilich, as the waltz offers beguiling innuendoes in rhythm, with deep timbres in the winds and silvery lyrics in the strings.

Despite the literal translation of the term *Scherzo* (playful, joking) the third movement is a bit more bittersweet than buoyant. Here again the score is essentially light, buffeted by springtime echoes in the woodwinds. In a moment, a rally of miniature bugles and drums conjures a toy shop with marionettes in parade.

To round off the suite, Tchaikovsky offers a grand theme and 12 variations, turbo-charged with excitement. (The movement was one of the composer’s favorites, and he programmed it often, including the concerts he conducted in New York at the opening of Carnegie Hall in 1891.) As noted above, the theatrical variety of the movement has found favor on the ballet stage, especially in Russia. The variations are musically diverse, with a folk dance or two, and even a quote of the requiem chant, *Dies irae*, in variation IV (which relates to the *Elegy* and *Valse mélancolique* in movements I and II – Tchaikovsky is always consistent). And about midway we are treated to one of the composer’s favorite delights – a big role for the solo violin, very similar in style to the Ukraine solo folk dance in I.

But the most telling folk connection to the music is the brilliant and bravura polacca (*Polonaise*), offered as the final variation. The rousing dance in triple time escorts the work to the closing curtain, with gusto on the wing.

### **Events of 1884** (*Suite No. 3* composed)

- John Dewey came to Ann Arbor to teach
- Grover Cleveland elected President of the United States
- Linotype machine invented for newspaper print
- Film roles invented by George Eastman
- Invention of the fountain pen
- Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is published
- Massenet's opera *Manon* premiered in Paris
- *Bathers at Asnieres* painted by Seurat
- First roller coaster built at Coney Island
- Diphtheria isolated in Berlin
- National Cash Register established

## **Primor Sluchin**

Born in 1977 to a father who plays trombone with the Ensemble InterContemporain (EIC) and a mother who is a violist, teacher and musical therapist, Primor Sluchin has prospered since a very young age from a musical education under the seal of eclecticism.



At the age of eight, she joined the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris to study with Annie Fontaine. She has since studied with the great masters of the harp such as Marie-Claire Jamet, Susanna Mildonian, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Michel Moragues. In 2001, she was awarded first prize at the CNS de Paris by unanimous decision. A joint finalist at the International Contest in Israel in 2002, she was awarded first prize at the international contest of the UFAM in Paris as well as the Concours de Musique de Chambre d'Arles.

She was a 2002 Laureate of the Spedidam prize of the Concours International Martine Géliot. In 2002, the prestigious grant of the Karajan Academy allowed Primor to join the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, where she performed under the direction of distinguished conductors Daniel Barenboim, Pierre Boulez, Bernard Haitink, Mariss Janssons, Zubin Mehta, and Sir Simon Rattle. Ms. Sluchin played and recorded on numerous occasions at the Festival of Salzburg, the Palau de la Musica and in the

Auditorium of Dijon for the Festival of Aix-en-Provence. Since 2003, she has been the Principal Harp of the Royal Opera of Wallonia.

In addition to recitals as a soloist and chamber musician with orchestras such as the Chamber Orchestra of Tel Aviv, the Ashland (Ohio) Symphony, and the Belgian Orchestre de Chambre Louis Poulet, she is a member of the Multilateral Ensemble. She plays in the Duo Sluchin with her brother, violinist Naaman Sluchin. Currently, she teaches at the Conservatoire de Neuilly-sur-Marne and participates in many international juries.

While in Ann Arbor, Ms. Sluchin has presented a master class for the harp studio of Professor Joan Holland.

Special thanks to Julie Smiegielski and Joan Holland of the U-M School of Music, Theatre and Dance, Linda Huff of the U-M International Center, and Meghan Covino of Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn LLP for their help in preparation for tonight's concert. Thanks to Bryan Parkhurst, Music Theory student at U-M, for his help in securing a harp.

## **Toyota**

Toyota Technical Center (TTC) is a division of Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing, NA established in 1977 and headquartered in Ann Arbor. TTC recently celebrated the grand opening of a new state of the art engineering design facility (350,000 square feet and \$150 million investment) and safety test facility (180,000 square feet and \$37 million investment) in York Township, south of Ann Arbor. During the October grand opening, TTC donated \$100,000 to the surrounding communities – to the Saline and Milan school districts, to the Michigan Economic Development Foundation and to establish a park maintenance fund in the neighborhood, in addition to donating the land. The A<sup>2</sup>SO performed two pieces with the Saline High School orchestra in a Side-by-Side performance as part of the grand opening ceremonies before Gov. Granholm and Toyota Motor Company's Senior Marketing Director, Yasuhiko Ichihashi.

TTC currently employs 1,000 team members and is engaged in engineering design, prototype building, vehicle evaluation and engineering, materials engineering, powertrain tuning and design, regulatory affairs and advanced research.

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