



Program Notes for kids

Opening Night with Jon Kimura Parker
Saturday, September 10, 2016
8:00 p.m.
Hill Auditorium

Shostakovich Festive Overture
Strauss Der Rosenkavalier Suite

Intermission

Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2



Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra
Music in the Key of A²

Festive Overture

by Dmitri Shostakovich

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

This piece is a *concert overture*: a short and lively introduction to an instrumental concert. An *overture* signals to the audience that the performance is beginning.

When was it written?

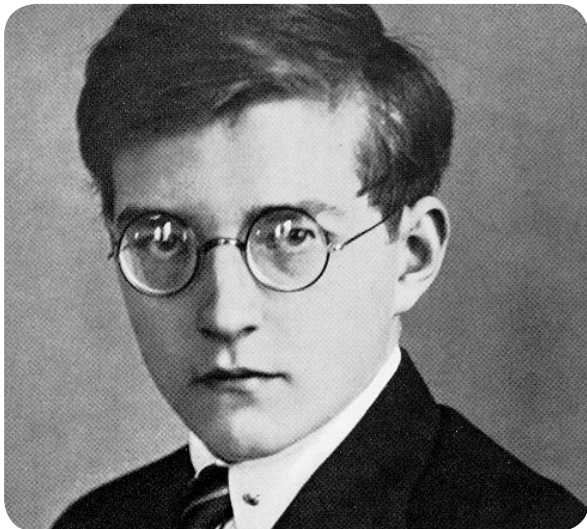
Festive Overture was first performed in 1954 in Moscow. Shostakovich composed it in record time, finishing it in just three days.

What is it about?

Shostakovich wrote *Festive Overture* for a government event to celebrate the 37th anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917, when the Soviets took control of Russia. The government wanted people to think that the Revolution was a good thing for Russia, so they asked Shostakovich to compose a lively, happy, and exciting piece. After its premiere it gained widespread popularity and became a piece all orchestras play, which Shostakovich found funny given the time it took him to compose it.

About the Composer

Dmitri Shostakovich | Born 1906 in St. Petersburg, Russia | Died August 9, 1975 in Moscow, Russia



No, that's not Harry Potter. It's Dmitri Shostakovich!

Family & Career

Dmitri Shostakovich was a child prodigy pianist and composer. When he began piano lessons at age 9, he took to it immediately, playing things by ear after hearing them only once. He entered a music conservatory when he was 13, and wrote his first symphony at age 19. He was married four times (twice to his first wife) and had two children: Galina and Maxim.

Music

Shostakovich lived in Soviet Russia, where the government kept a tight watch on intellectuals and artists. His life was a constant struggle between his own creativity and having to do what Joseph Stalin's government wanted. Shostakovich frequently suffered at the hand of the government: his works were banned, he received bad re-

views of his music in the official government newspaper, he was forced to give public apologies for his works, and he had to write music in praise of Stalin. Fearful of rejection (which could mean arrest, imprisonment, or even death), he wrote a lot of music that he immediately threw away or hid away in his desk drawer. Despite all this, Shostakovich wrote quite a lot of music in varying styles: 15 symphonies, 15 string quartets, 3 operas, and film music, among other things.

Listen for...

Look for the crash cymbals. They mark exciting and important parts of the piece at the beginning and the end.

The woodwinds play very fast passages that are passed around to different parts of the orchestra. What does the music sound like to you? Does it sound like a celebration?

Der Rosenkavalier Suite

by Richard Strauss

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

This is a *suite*: a set of short instrumental or orchestral pieces performed on a concert. *Der Rosenkavalier Suite* is a set of songs taken from Strauss's opera of the same name.

When was it written?

Strauss composed the opera *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1909-1910. In 1944, over 30 years later, he agreed to create an orchestral suite using pieces from the opera.

What is it about?

Der Rosenkavalier means "The Knight of the Rose" in German. Set in 18th-century Vienna, the opera follows the story of Octavian, a young nobleman who is having an affair with the Marschallin, an older married woman. However, he ends up meeting the young and beautiful Sophie. Funny tricks and schemes unfold as Octavian and Sophie fall in love. In the end, the Marschallin gives up Octavian so that he and Sophie can be together.

About the Composer

Richard Strauss | Born June 11, 1864 in Munich, Germany | Died September 8, 1949 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

Family & Career

From a young age music played a central role in Richard Strauss's life. Born into a musical family, he was the first child of Josepha and Franz Strauss. His father, Franz, was a famous French Horn player and he taught his young son a lot about music. Richard started piano lessons at age 4, and wrote his first composition by the age of 6. The young Strauss attended orchestra rehearsals in Munich with his father, where he received his first lessons in music theory and composition. By the age of 18, he had already written 140 pieces.

Strauss married a soprano named Pauline de Ahna. They had one son, whom they named Franz.

Music

Strauss was one of the great composers of the 20th century. He loved the music of the 19th-century composers, Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt, who composed program music. *Program music* is music written to convey specific events or ideas, like painting a picture with sound. Strauss had the ability to make a scene or event come to life with just music. He composed a lot of music for voice and for orchestra, and later in life turned to writing opera. He wrote some of the greatest operas and orchestral program music of the 20th century.



Renée Fleming as the Marschallin

Listen for...

In this suite there are fight scenes, love scenes, dances and victories. Can you hear the different sections? As you listen, think about what scene Strauss was trying to portray.

The oboe plays the first love scene music. Listen for this sweet and beautiful melody.



Brahms at the piano

Piano Concerto No. 2

by Johannes Brahms

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

A *concerto* is a piece of music written for a solo instrument with an orchestra. In this case, the pianist is the soloist, so he sits at the front of the stage and plays the most important part. In a *concerto*, the soloist and orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloist could play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloist, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos usually have three *movements*, or sections. This piece, however, has four.

When was it written?

Brahms finished his *Piano Concerto No. 2* in 1881. He dedicated it to his childhood music teacher, Eduard Marxsen.

About the Composer

Johannes Brahms | Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany | Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austria

Fun Facts

Brahms never really grew up. He didn't care much about how he looked, he left his clothes lying all over the floor of his house, he loved merry-go-rounds and circus sideshows, and he continued playing with his childhood toys until he was almost 30 years old. And his voice apparently sounded like a little boy's until well into his 20s.

Brahms loved children. He would often be seen with a whole parade of kids following him since he was known to give out candy.

Family & Career

Brahms's father, Johann Jakob Brahms, was a *bierfiedler*: literally, a "beer fiddler" who played in small bands at bars. The young Brahms inherited his father's love of music but wanted to study piano rather than becoming a *bierfiedler*. But his father still capitalized on his son's talents by hiring him out to play dancing music on piano at bars. Brahms eventually escaped the life of a bar musician and went on to study composition.

Music

Brahms's music isn't overly-emotional like that of his colleagues, Liszt and Wagner. The stylistic feud that broke out between the more rational, old fashioned composers (Brahms and Robert Schumann) and the more emotional ones (Liszt and Wagner) was called The War of

the Romantics. The "War" got so bad at one point that, after Brahms performed one of his piano concertos, the audience sat in silence, refusing to clap in order to show that they liked Liszt more.

Brahms is now regarded as one of the "three Bs," three of the greatest composers of classical music: Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.