

# PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Orchestra, Illinois

November 18, 2023

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## **Glinka - Overture from *Ruslan and Ludmilla***

Mikhail Glinka composed his opera *Ruslan and Ludmilla* between 1837-1842 based on a poem by Alexander Pushkin of the same name. Pushkin originally intended to write the libretto to the opera, but was killed in a duel before his composition could be finished. The opera portrays the Ukrainian city of Kiev, following the story of Ruslan rescuing Ludmilla while trekking through a series of diverse landscapes and being greeted by an abundance of fantastic characters and creatures.

*Ruslan and Ludmilla* was premiered on November 27th, 1842 in Saint Petersburg, where it was not initially well-received. The growing popularity of Italian opera in Russia likely caused the negative reception, though its popularity in Russia has grown significantly since, with over 700 performances staged at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.

The overture begins with a grand celebration through a simple, stately theme followed by rapid scales in the string sections. The opening section quickly expands from the simplistic theme stated in the beginning by continuing to add to the virtuosity of the string parts by moving from scalar figures to more difficult patterns. As the work moves toward the second theme, the whirlwind of eighth notes clears, allowing for the rocking octave accompaniment in the violins underneath the viola and cello statement of the second theme. This theme contrasts the fleeting patterns seen near the beginning of the piece through its slow continuation, yet relates back to the opening themes via its cheerful optimism hidden within the musical gestures.

## **Arutiunian - *Trumpet Concerto in A-flat major***

Alexander Arutiunian's *Trumpet Concerto*, displays the composer's use of Soviet influence infused with Armenian tonality within the classical genre. The piece, a neo-classical and through-composed work, uses a mixture of slow, passionate melodies and flashy virtuosity infused with eastern European melodic influences. Arutiunian initially composed the concerto for Principal trumpeter of the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra, Zsolak Vartasarian, though his death in combat during World War II caused Arutiunian to halt progress on the concerto. Arutiunian completed the piece in 1950, with Soviet trumpeter Aykaz Messiayan premiering the work. The work's popularity, especially throughout the United States, was championed by the Russian virtuoso Timofei Dokschidzer, who recorded the work and toured internationally, performing at a variety of venues (one of which was with Quincy Symphony Orchestra conductor Dr. Bruce Briney performing in the ensemble!).

The concerto begins with an *andante* introduction before introducing a melody using exoticism through Armenian musical language. Arutiunian states that he did not directly utilize any folk songs in the work, though the aesthetic of the piece demonstrates its intimate ties with folk inspiration. As the work advances, the music progresses toward faster tempos, allowing for diverse character exploration in the various sections of the piece. The middle is one such moment, where the muted solo trumpet reflects a tango before returning to the initial themes, altered with syncopated accompaniment. The concerto culminates with a technically demanding cadenza, written by Dokschidzer in 1977, before concluding with a celebratory coda.

## **Brahms - Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90**

Johannes Brahms composed his *Third Symphony* in the summer of 1883, following the composition of several of his significant works, such as the *Violin Concerto* and *Piano Concerto No. 2*. The symphony, written during his stay in Wiesbaden, a picturesque town on the Rhine in central Germany, surpasses the grandeur he reached with his previous symphonies, through further development of musical ideas and use of a cyclical form. Brahms foregrounds his personal motto, "Free but happy" ("*Frei aber froh*") through the opening motif of F-A $\flat$ -F, a musical gesture found across his works (though its musical usage was neither confirmed nor denied by the composer).

The first movement, *Allegro con brio*, transforms a theme from Robert Schumann's *Rhenish Symphony*, evoking imagery of the scenic river. Brahms achieves tension throughout the first movement by frequently obscuring the meter of the movement, and through conflict between the major and minor modes, which is continued throughout the symphony. The second movement begins with a folk-inspired theme in the woodwinds before introducing supporting melodic material in the strings. The third movement, *poco allegretto*, opens with a gentle melody first beginning in the cellos, before moving to the violins and eventually, the horn. The symphony concludes with a rumbling theme across the orchestra, which grows more intense as the work develops, further exploring the push and pull from the conflict of the major and minor modes. Brahms closes the final movement with a resolution to the major key, resolving the conflict and tension brought about in this work.