Ingrid Fliter, piano
Friday, August 1, 2008 at 8 p.m.
Pre-Concert Talk at 7 p.m.

Program Notes by Stephen Aechternacht

Frédéric Chopin
(Born March 1, 1810 near Warsaw, Poland; died October 17, 1849, age 39)

Igor Stravinsky
(Born June 17, 1882 in Oranienbaum, Russia; died April 6, 1971 in New York, age 88)

Grande Valse Brillante, Op. 18
(Completed in 1831, age 21; orchestrated by Stravinsky in 1909, age 26)

In 1908, the noted Russian ballet choreographer Sergei Diaghilev heard two orchestral works by a young, unknown Russian composer named Igor Stravinsky. Impressed by the sparkling and refined orchestration of Fireworks and Scherzo fantastique, the impresario commissioned Stravinsky to orchestrate piano music of Grieg and Chopin for upcoming ballet performances in Paris. The Diaghilev production, entitled “Les Sylphides” was premiered June 2, 1909 at the Theatre du Chatelet.

One of the Chopin piano pieces that Stravinsky orchestrated was the 1831 Grande Valse Brillante, among Chopin’s best known earlier works. The score appears to have remained in the hands of Diaghilev’s family for many years after his death, and during the 1980s the score appeared in a large collection of manuscripts of French music that was purchased by the University of Texas. The score now resides in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center on the UT campus.

Recommended Recordings: Due to the unique nature of the orchestral version you are hearing this evening, there are no existing recordings of this version. There are, however, many fine recordings of the original piano work. Consult your local recorded music retailer.

Frédéric Chopin
(Born March 1, 1810 near Warsaw, Poland; died October 17, 1849, age 39)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, Op. 21
(Completed in 1830, age 20)

Chopin’s genius lay in elevating the piano miniature to a great art form. With the exception of a few songs and some minor chamber works, all of his compositional output was devoted to music for the piano. In his six works that feature an orchestra, including the piano concerto heard this evening, the role of the orchestra is purely as an accompaniment. His orchestration is very simple and straightforward (some observers describe it as somewhat awkward and apologetic). The orchestra never inserts itself with its own musical ideas; it is purely there to frame the piano’s sometimes delicate, sometimes passionate utterances.

He was born Fryderyk Francisek Chopin to father Nicholas, who immigrated to Poland from his native Marainville, Vosges, France (which explains the decidedly un-Polish sounding surname). His mother was Tekla-Justina Krzyżanowska. History is pleased that the boy decided not to adopt his Polish mother’s name or tonight we would be celebrating one Fryderyk Krzyżanowski! Throughout

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his life, he followed his family decision to pay homage to their French heritage, using Frédéric as his first name.

Two life themes dogged Chopin: illness and thwarted love. Many of his letters display a kind of Byronic despair, although his life was not without happy moments.

Frail as a child, Chopin was further hampered in his social life by painful shyness. Both these attributes influenced him to a delicate playing style, and while his first career goal was to become a concert pianist, his pianism was not to the tastes of Polish or French audiences, who preferred a bolder musical approach. At 18 his first love was a vocal student, Konstancja Gladkowska. Shyness prevented him from declaring his love, so he poured it out in several piano works, including tonight's Piano Concerto. Some years later, he fell in love with the daughter of a wealthy Polish family, but the family forbade the union due to Chopin's chronic ill-health. In 1837, the free-living novelist George Sand became Chopin's mistress, Chopin secretly and sporadically cohabitating with Sand and her children. Years later, when Sand's passion waned, and Chopin's health further deteriorated, and the on-again, off-again relationship finally ended. In November of 1848, Chopin wrote to a friend, “You and I are a couple of old cembalos on which time and circumstances have played out their memorable trills...in clumsy hands we can not give forth new sounds and we stifle within ourselves those things which no one will ever draw from us, and all for the lack of a repairer.” In less than 11 months, Chopin was dead, probably from tuberculosis, at the age of 39.

Chopin composed the Piano Concerto No. 2 between the autumn of 1829 and the spring of 1830. Actually it was the first piano concerto he composed, but it was published as the second. Inspired by his love of Gladkowska, Chopin wrote of the middle movement of this concerto, “It may mean my downfall, but I already have my ideal, whom I serve faithfully although I have not spoken to her for half a year now, of whom I dream, and in homage to the Adagio in my concerto is written.” This movement, similar to the comparable movement of the Piano Concerto No. 1, is the emotional heart of the work, and expresses the composer’s emotions eloquently and intimately when his ability to verbally express himself failed hopelessly. The first movement is deliberately showy, and the final movement, Allegro vivace, is, as its tempo marking implies, a vivacious Polish folk dance, a Mazurka.

**Recommended Recording:** Krystian Zimerman, piano & conductor, Polish Festival Orchestr Deutsche Grammophon 459684

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**Sergei Prokofiev**  
(Born April 23, 1891 in Sontskova, Ukraine; died March 5, 1953 in Nikolina Gora, Russia, age 61)

**Romeo and Juliet, Op. 64: Excerpts**  
(Completed in 1938, age 47)

Sergei Prokofiev was a much-cosseted only child who began composing at age five. His mother was his first piano tutor, but quite soon the student outgrew the teacher and the eminent composer Rheinhold Glière was brought in to chez-Prokofiev to push the young Sergei along the path of the pianistic greatness he would soon achieve. At 13 he was admitted to the St. Petersburg Conservatory, but clashed with teachers and fellow students. Prokofiev's musical ideas were simply too “modern” for the traditional mentalities there. He left the conservatory in 1914 with the prestigious Rubinstein Prize for composition under his arm, and for four years dazzled Russian audiences with his incredible talents as a pianist and infuriated them with the spiky dissonances of his music (one Russian critic decried Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 2, saying that it “left listeners frozen with fright, hair standing on end”).
The revolutionary events of 1917 rendered Prokofiev’s future uncertain, so he set off for America in the early part of 1918. Upon arriving in San Francisco, immigration authorities detained him briefly, suspecting him to be a Bolshevik spy. His reception and success in America were mixed, and Prokofiev never felt very comfortable in what he perceived to be an odd culture. So, it was off to Paris where he hoped that he would be received as the next succès d’estime after Igor Stravinsky. Prokofiev got what he wished for: Parisians liked the shock value of his music as well as the digital pyrotechnics of his playing.

Nonetheless, Prokofiev longed for Mother Russia, and he returned, with his wife Lina and their two children, in 1936. In his 18-year absence, the Soviet Government had stabilized, and he was welcomed home warmly. In the bargain, Prokofiev’s music changed; its hard edges were softened, its dissonances resolved into lush melodies, its shock value palliated. Whether this change came as part of a natural maturation scheme, or was the result of Prokofiev’s fear that he would antagonize Soviet authorities, who saw music as a propagandic tool, is unclear. Regardless, Prokofiev penned his greatest and most popular works as the result of this rapprochement with his homeland.

Fate selected a strange day to call Prokofiev into the afterlife. He died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage on March 5, 1953, the same day that his artistic nemesis, Joseph Stalin, died. Stalin’s cultural policies both stimulated and restricted Prokofiev’s creative output during the last seventeen years of the composer’s life. The news of Stalin’s demise commanded the front page of every newspaper in the world. The notice of Prokofiev’s passing was relegated—buried, so to speak—in the depths of the back pages of most of the world’s dailies.

*Romeo and Juliet* is, arguably, Prokofiev’s greatest music for the ballet. He composed it after his Parisian tenure, Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre, being the commissioning entity. After Prokofiev completed the ballet, the Bolshoi declared it impossible to dance to and the commission was withdrawn. In an attempt to mollify the Bolshoi bosses, Prokofiev tampered with the ballet’s ending, allowing Romeo to arrive just in time prior to Juliet’s suicide to eventuate a happy ending, but the Russians were unmoved. The ballet was premiered in Brno, Czechoslovakia in December of 1938. As the result of the ballet’s problematic history, a satirical couplet circulated: “Never was a story of more woe, than Prokofiev’s score to Romeo.”

Prokofiev arranged three suites of ballet excerpts, but most conductors, including Maestro Bay this evening, re-combine movements to satisfy their taste and sense of drama. His selections include the sprightly Morning Dance; the stately Minuet from Act I which accompanies the two families’ guests to the ball; Masks, the following dance where everyone is hidden from the families’ disputes; Montagues and Capulets, the dramatic and somewhat dissonant announcement of the feuding families, a dance that portends the ballet’s inevitable tragic conclusion; Romeo and Juliet, a predictably tender description of the lovers’ first moments together; Death of Tybalt, the frenetic and deathly duel scene where Mercutio slays his rival; Aubade, a crisp, ebullient beginning to, ironically, Juliet’s last day alive; Romeo at the Grave of Juliet, somber but beautiful music expressing Romeo’s grief; and The Death of Juliet, exquisite and sad, this music combines tragedy with resignation and a sense of ultimate healing. Perhaps now, after the senseless loss of life and intractable narcissism, the two families can now exact a place of peace. Prokofiev’s music accomplishes this denouement perfectly.

**Recommended Recording:** Lorin Maazel, Cleveland Orchestra London 45297 (2 CDs-Complete Ballet)