

Concert Program for October 21, 22, and 23, 2011

Vasily Petrenko, conductor
Olga Kern, piano

RACHMANINOFF *The Isle of the Dead*, op. 29 (1909)
(1873-1943)

CHOPIN **Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, op. 11** (1830)
(1810-1849) Allegro maestoso
Romanze: Larghetto—
Rondo: Vivace

Olga Kern, piano

Intermission

ELGAR *Enigma Variations (Variations on an Original Theme)*,
(1857-1934) **op. 36** (1899)
Enigma: Andante
Variation I. "C.A.E.": Listesso tempo
Variation II. "H.D.S-P.": Allegro
Variation III. "R.B.T.": Allegretto
Variation IV. "W.M.B.": Allegro di molto
Variation V. "R.P.A.": Moderato—
Variation VI. "Ysobel": Andantino
Variation VII. "Troyte": Presto
Variation VIII. "W.N.": Allegretto—
Variation IX. "Nimrod": Moderato
Variation X. "Dorabella" Intermezzo: Allegretto
Variation XI. "G.R.S.": Allegro di molto
Variation XII. "B.G.N.": Andante—
Variation XIII. "***" Romanza: Moderato
Variation XIV. "E.D.U." Finale: Allegro

Vasily Petrenko is the Ann and Paul Lux Guest Artist.

Olga Kern is the Sid and Jean Grossman Guest Artist.

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Mr. and Mrs. Walter L. Hawkins Jr.

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Vasily Petrenko Ann and Paul Lux Guest Artist

Born and educated in St. Petersburg (at the St. Petersburg Capella Boys Music School and the St. Petersburg Conservatory), Vasily Petrenko was Resident Conductor at the St. Petersburg State Opera and Ballet Theatre (1994-97) and Chief Conductor of the State Academy Orchestra of St. Petersburg (2004-07). He is currently Chief Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (contract extended

until 2015), and Principal Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. In February 2011 it was announced that Petrenko will take up the position of Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra in the 2013-14 season.

In recent seasons, he made debuts with the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Finnish Radio Symphony, NHK Symphony Tokyo, Sydney Symphony, and Accademia di Santa Cecilia, and toured with the European Union Youth Orchestra. In the U.S. he has made successful debuts with many top level orchestras, including the Philadelphia and Minnesota orchestras, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco, Dallas, and Baltimore symphony orchestras.

Future highlights include tour periods in Europe and the U.S. with the Russian National and Oslo Philharmonic Orchestras, return visits to the Philharmonia, Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and San Francisco Symphony, and debuts with the Czech Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Chicago Symphony, and the National Symphony in Washington D.C.

His wide operatic repertoire includes *Macbeth* (Glyndebourne Festival Opera), *Eugene Onegin* (Opéra de Paris), *Le villi, I due Foscari, Boris Godunov* (Netherlands Reisopera), and *Pique Dame* (Hamburg State Opera). Future plans include his debut at the Zurich Opera (*Carmen*).

Recordings with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic include a rare double bill of Fleishman's one-act opera *Rothschild's Violin* and Shostakovich's *The Gamblers*, Rachmaninoff's Symphonic Dances, and recordings for Naxos of Tchaikovsky's Manfred Symphony (winner of the 2009 Gramophone Award for Best Orchestral Recording) and the first discs of an ongoing Shostakovich cycle (Symphonies 5, 8, 9, 10 and 11). In 2007 Petrenko was named Young Artist of the Year at the annual Gramophone Awards, and in 2009 he was awarded Honorary Doctorates by both the University of Liverpool and Liverpool Hope University, in recognition of the immense impact he has had on the city's cultural scene.

Vasily Petrenko most recently conducted the St. Louis Symphony in April 2009.



Olga Kern Sid and Jean Grossman Guest Artist

Now recognized as one of her generation's great pianists, Olga Kern's career began one decade ago with her award-winning gold-medal performance at the 11th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2001. Her second catapulting triumph came in New York City on May 4, 2004, with a highly acclaimed New York City recital debut at Carnegie's Zankel Hall. In an unprecedented turn of events, Kern gave a second recital eight days later in Isaac Stern Auditorium at the invitation of Carnegie Hall.

With her vivid stage presence, passionately confident musicianship and extraordinary technique, the striking young Russian pianist continues to captivate fans and critics alike. In the 2011-12 season Kern debuts with the Baltimore Symphony and the Sacramento Philharmonic, and will return to the Houston, Colorado, and Phoenix symphonies and National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa. In the winter of 2012 Kern will make an extensive recital tour of North America with the world renowned violinist Vladimir Spivakov, their first chamber music collaboration outside of Europe.

In April 2011, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and the Van Cliburn Foundation undertook a special co-presentation of Kern in celebration of her tremendous success of the last 10 years. Her 2010-11 season included opening week with the Colorado Symphony and closing week with the Detroit Symphony, plus subscription weeks with the Nashville and Pittsburgh symphonies, as well as recitals at Longwood Gardens, Sanibel, and Winter Park music festivals, Drake University, and her debut at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. At Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall she performed Chopin's Piano Concerto No.1 for the composer's 200th Anniversary Celebration.

Kern was born into a family of musicians with direct links to Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff and began studying piano at the age of five. Winner of the first Rachmaninoff International Piano Competition when she was 17, she is a laureate of 11 international competitions and has toured throughout her native Russia, Europe, and the United States, as well as in Japan, South Africa, and South Korea. The recipient of an honorary scholarship from the President of Russia in 1996, she is a member of Russia's International Academy of Arts. She began her formal training with acclaimed teacher Evgeny Timakin at the Moscow Central School and continued with Professor Sergei Dorensky at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, where she was also a postgraduate student. She also studied with Boris Petrushansky at the acclaimed Accademia Pianistica Incontri col Maestro in Imola, Italy.

Olga Kern most recently performed with the St. Louis Symphony in November 2010.

Music of Many Colors

BY JAY GOODWIN

Ideas at Play

The music on this program comes from three of the great masters of instrumental color and—in the case of Rachmaninoff and Elgar—tone painting, the technique of portraying people, places, and events through sound. Chopin, one of the earliest true Romantics, forever changed keyboard music by realizing the coloristic possibilities of the emerging modern piano. He wrote music that turns the instrument into an orchestra all its own and speaks as much through shading as through melody and rhythm. His Concerto No. 1 is an early work but already demonstrates his unique compositional voice. In the ominous *The Isle of the Dead*, Rachmaninoff goes one step farther, applying his tonal effects to something tangible by depicting Arnold Böcklin's painting of the same name in music and giving us one of history's great examples of the tone poem. Finally, Elgar applies the technique to real life in his *Enigma Variations*, depicting 14 of his closest friends with infectious, whimsical charm.

Serge Rachmaninoff *The Isle of the Dead*

Born: Semyonovo, Russia, April 1, 1873 **Died:** Beverly Hills, California, March 28, 1943 **First Performance:** April 18, 1909, in Moscow **STL Symphony premiere:** February 24, 1911, Max Zach conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** December 5, 1976, Leonard Slatkin conducting **Scoring:** Three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, and tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 20 minutes



PETER FESINA-ARISMA, PAL

Rachmaninoff

In Context 1909 *Serbia mobilizes against Austria and Hungary; Russian troops invade Persia; Ballets Russes becomes a sensation in Paris*

A small, rocky island rises from the darkness of an eerily calm sea. At its center stands a grove of tall, slender trees that seem to consume the light. The isle is deserted yet bears the marks of man; a row of rectangular vaults is hewn from the rock, and a wall with a narrow entrance guards the small harbor. A rowboat approaches. In its bow is a coffin, over which stands a figure draped all in white, eyes fixed ahead. The oarsman, dressed in black, propels the vessel gently forward toward the landing.

This image, depicted in Swiss Symbolist artist Arnold Böcklin's painting *Isle of the Dead*, resonated with all manners of famous people in the early 20th century, including Freud, Lenin, and Hitler. Rachmaninoff, described by Stravinsky as "six feet, two inches of Russian gloom," had

a penchant for all things sinister and ominous, and was immediately inspired when he saw Böcklin's piece. He completed his symphonic poem of the same name in 1909.

The Music Throughout his career, Rachmaninoff was fascinated—obsessed, even—with the *Dies irae* motif, which has been used in funereal and wrathful music since the days of Gregorian chant. It pervades *The Isle of the Dead*, woven into almost every measure and forming the thematic basis of all the central motifs. The work is a study in stasis and shading, proceeding at the same general tempo for its entire 20-minute length and proceeding only through slow, gradual changes in orchestration and mood. The music begins in a gently lapping 5/8 meter, illustrating the boat's slow approach to the island, underscored with ominous, rumbling bass. It slowly gains momentum and volume, building to a menacing climax about halfway through the piece. A new theme emerges in the upper strings and woodwinds, which is much more hopeful and uplifting. Rachmaninoff explained that this theme represents life, and its interaction with the *Dies irae* music illustrates the cyclical nature of life and death. The “life” theme gradually builds and struggles to a yearning climax of its own, but just when it reaches its peak, the *Dies irae* comes crashing back, drowning the new theme and propelling the work to its hushed, mournful conclusion.

Frédéric François Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, op. 11

Born: Duchy of Warsaw, February 22 or March 1, 1810 **Died:** Paris, October 17, 1849 **First Performance:** October 11, 1830, in Warsaw, Chopin was soloist **STL Symphony premiere:** February 18, 1909, Osip Gabrilowitsch was soloist, with Max Zach conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** December 7, 2008, Louis Lortie was soloist, with Michael Christie conducting **Scoring:** Solo piano, pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 39 minutes



Chopin portrait by Delacroix, 1838

In Context 1830 *French forces occupy Algiers; Nicholas I of Russia ruthlessly represses insurrection in Poland; Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique premieres*

When Chopin composed his two piano concertos—completed in rapid succession over the course of about a year—he was just 19 years old and barely finished with his formal training at the Warsaw Conservatory. Having lived his whole life in Poland and having traveled little until the few years leading up to the composition of the concertos (and even then not widely or often), he was not exposed at a young age to most of what we consider the best music being composed at the time. He had studied Bach and some solo works of Mozart, but it is unlikely he had heard much, if any,

Beethoven or Schubert. He almost certainly had heard few piano concertos still being played today. Rather, he had consumed concertos by composers such as Hummel, Moscheles, Gyrowetz, Field, and Kalkbrenner. Or, as musicologist and pianist Charles Rosen bluntly puts it, the concertos Chopin knew were “neither Classical nor Romantic but in a degenerate classical style.” Chopin’s own two concertos “graced this inferior style with the only masterpieces it was ever to know.” Chopin was familiar with Italian opera, however, and it was his ability even at such a young age to combine operatic techniques, the love for and mastery of counterpoint he had taken from Bach and Mozart, and his own unique genius that sets his concertos apart from those by the composers mentioned above.

The Music The soloist’s entrance after the orchestral introduction immediately announces the presence of the Chopin we know and love from his later solo works, if a bit less brilliant. The *Allegro maestoso*—a lengthy movement in somewhat modified sonata form that actually feels more like a progression of smaller episodes due to its extended and delineated developments of various themes—is characterized by the soloist’s virtuosic yet eloquent extensions and extrapolations of ideas introduced by the orchestra. The central Romance, with its rhapsodic, painterly washes of melody and ambience is the most similar to Chopin’s later solo works, and it points to the style he would immortalize in his Nocturnes, a few of which he had already begun. The Rondo finale, an animated but less developed movement than the other two, is based on a quick, syncopated Polish dance form called the *krakowiak*, which inspired the composer’s one-movement piece for piano and orchestra from his student years, *Rondo à la krakowiak*.

Edward Elgar *Enigma Variations* (Variations on an Original Theme), op. 36

Born: Worcester, England, June 2, 1857 **Died:** Worcester, February 23, 1934 **First Performance:** June 19, 1899, London, Hans Richter conducting **STL Symphony premiere:** March 15, 1912, Max Zach conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** January 13, 2007, Peter Oundjian conducting **Scoring:** Two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and percussion, and strings. **Performance time:** Approximately 29 minutes



Elgar

In Context 1899 British victorious over the Boers at Modder River in South Africa; French court overturns the 1894 guilty verdict against Capt. Dreyfus; first household refrigerating machine patented

Elgar’s *Enigma Variations* are at the same time some of the most direct, descriptive works in the repertoire and some of the most mysterious. We know how, when, and why they were composed, we know that each variation is a musical representation of an important person in

the composer's life, and we know the identities of those people (with one exception) as well as to which variation each belongs. We even know that a bulldog belonging to one of Elgar's friends makes a musical appearance. But the enigma lurks in the most fundamental aspect of the work. These are, after all, Variations on an Original Theme, and we do not know the theme.

On October 21, 1898, Elgar came home from a long day teaching violin lessons, ate dinner with his wife, then sat down at the piano with a cigar to relax. He poked away at the keyboard, improvising simple melodies. "Suddenly my wife interrupted by saying, 'Edward, that's a good tune,'" the composer recalled. "I awoke from the dream: 'Eh? Tune, what tune?' and she said, 'Play it again, I like that tune.' I played and strummed, and played, and then she exclaimed, 'That's the tune!'" Elgar then began to repeat and alter the melody, asking his wife to guess which of their friends each alteration sounded like, and the idea for the Variations was born.

But when it came time to compose the work in earnest, Elgar added his famous riddle, titling the opening section "Enigma" rather than giving it the traditional label of "Theme," or something else to similarly indicate that the melody contained within it would be the basis for the variations to follow. "The 'Enigma' I will not explain—it's 'dark saying' must be left unguessed... further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes,' but is not played ... so the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late dramas the chief character is never on stage." Much study and speculation has been dedicated to discovering the hidden theme of this work, which is hinted at yet never played; popular theories over the years have suggested the tunes of "Rule Britannia," "God Save the Queen," and "Auld Lang Syne," as well as a melody from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. But if Elgar had in mind a well-known popular or classical tune, why did he call the work Variations on an *Original Theme*? And as he says that the theme goes "through and over the whole set," and as the work portrays his loved ones, perhaps the theme is not musical at all, and is as simple as the idea of friendship or love. In any case, Elgar took the solution to the riddle to his grave and ensured that the *Enigma Variations* will always live up to their name.

The Music After the Andante introduction, the mysterious fog clears, and Elgar provides clear indications of who and what is portrayed in all but one of his 14 variations:

- I. (C.A.E.): The variations begin, fittingly, with a tender, lyrical evocation of Caroline Alice Elgar, the composer's wife.
- II. (H.D.S.P.): Here Elgar portrays the idle tinkling of amateur pianist Hew David Stewart-Powell, who played in a trio with the composer, warming up.
- III. (R.B.T.): Richard Baxter Townshend—an author and scholar who enjoyed giving readings and doing impersonations, and whose voice had a tendency to crack—speaks excitedly.

- IV. (W.M.B.): William Meath Baker, a blustery country squire, brusquely proclaims the day's agenda then slams the door as he makes his exit.
- V. (R.P.A.): The young pianist and philosopher Richard P. Arthur ponders and daydreams his way through a lazy day.
- VI. (Ysobel): The amateur violist Isabel Fitton, who had difficulty with string crossing, struggles through an exercise.
- VII. (Troyte): The architect Arthur Troyte Griffith bumbles and stumbles at the keyboard as Elgar hopelessly attempts to teach him to play the piano.
- VIII. (W.N.): We hear the characteristic laugh, and see the beautiful home and property, of Winifred Norbury, a music-lover who played host to frequent gatherings of musicians.
- IX. (Nimrod): This variation depicts Elgar and his close friend August Jaeger ("Jaeger" means "hunter" in German; Nimrod is a famous hunter from the Old Testament) having a long discussion about Beethoven's slow movements. The melody suggests the Adagio of Beethoven's "Pathétique" Sonata.
- X. (Dorabella): The young, bubbly Miss Dora Penney—whose nickname here is an allusion to *Così fan tutte*—converses happily with the composer despite her slight stutter.
- XI. (G.R.S.): The initials belong to George Robertson Sinclair, the organist of Hereford Cathedral, but the music belongs to Sinclair's bulldog Dan, who can be heard falling into the river Wye in pursuit of a stick, then paddling to shore and barking his victory.
- XII. (B.G.N.): The heartfelt melody in the cellos is a tribute to Elgar's "serious and devoted friend" Basil G. Nevinson, a talented amateur cellist.
- XIII. (***): The one variation without a definitive identity, this Romanza quotes Mendelssohn's song "Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage" and may refer to Lady Mary Lygon, a prominent society lady; Helen Jessie Weaver, Elgar's first love; or Alice Stuart-Wortley, a very close friend of the composer's and the secret dedicatee of his Violin Concerto.
- XIV. (E.D.U.): Elgar saved himself—his wife playfully called him "Edoo"—for last, and the work concludes with a variation intended to illustrate the composer's "musical future." It also makes reference to the two most influential people in his life—his wife and Jaeger—by quoting their respective variations.