

Orchestre National de Lyon

Friday, January 31, 2003, 8 pm
Hertz Hall

David Robertson, music director and conductor
Emmanuelle Réville, flute solo
France Verrot and Benoît le Touzé, flutes

PROGRAM

Igor Stravinsky Symphonies of Wind Instruments
(1947 version)

Pierre Boulez OrigineI
From ...explosante-fixe...
for flute and ensemble (1991/1993)

INTERMISSION

Richard Wagner Siegfried Idyll

Arnold Schoenberg Chamber Symphony No. 1
for 15 instruments, Op. 9
(in one movement)

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The Orchestre National de Lyon would like to thank the AFAA-Ville de Lyon,
Infogrames, and the Société Philharmonique de Lyon for their special support.

The Orchestre National de Lyon is funded by the town of Lyon,
the French Ministry of Culture, and the Region Rhone Alpes.

This presentation of the Orchestre National de Lyon is made possible
with the support of the Friends of Cal Performances.

Cal Performances thanks the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
and the Zellerbach Family Fund for their generous support.

Cal Performances receives additional funding from the National Endowment for the Arts,
a federal agency that supports the visual, literary, and performing arts to benefit all Americans,
and the California Arts Council, a state agency.

Symphonies of Wind Instruments
(1947 version)

Igor Stravinsky (1882 –1971)

Igor Stravinsky first met Claude Debussy following the premiere of *The Firebird* in Paris in 1910. A mutual admiration sprang up between the two. Stravinsky dedicated his cantata *Zvezdoliki* to Debussy, and Debussy reciprocated by inscribing the *Scherzando*, the third of his three pieces for two pianos, *En blanc et noir*, to Stravinsky. Though they saw little of each other during the First

World War, Stravinsky was greatly saddened by Debussy's death on March 25, 1918. "I was sincerely attached to him as a man," Stravinsky wrote, "and I grieved not only at the loss of one whose friendship had been marked with unfailing kindness towards myself and my work, but at the passing of an artist who, in spite of health already undermined, had still been able to retain his creative powers to the full, and whose musical genius had been in no way impaired throughout the whole period of his activity."

In June 1920, Stravinsky left Switzerland, where he had taken refuge during the War, and installed himself in the French coastal village of Carantec in Brittany. Soon after arriving, he received a request from Henri Prunières, editor of *La Revue Musicale*, to contribute a short musical piece to a special December issue of that periodical commemorating Debussy. He accepted the commission gladly, and on June 20th composed a wordless chorale in piano score, which he submitted to Prunières. The chorale, however, was pressed into further service. A full year before, in July 1919, Stravinsky had begun sketching a wind ensemble piece incorporating the mixed-meter rhythms of *The Rite of Spring* and the austere sonorities of *Les Noces*, and the Debussy chorale was conceived as the closing section of this earlier work, which became, in the composer's words, "a grand chant, an objective cry of wind instruments, in place of the warm human tone of the strings." The *Symphonies d'instruments à vents* ("Symphonies of Wind Instruments") was drafted in piano score by July 2, 1920, and orchestrated by November 30th, when Stravinsky was living in Garches. The composition was dedicated to Debussy. The premiere, given by Koussevitzky in London on June 6, 1921, was not a success, however, and Stravinsky never published the *Symphonies* in its original version. In 1945, he returned to the piece and revised the orchestration of the chorale for a CBS Radio broadcast for use as a brief companion piece to the *Symphony of Psalms*; he subsequently rescored the entire piece and simplified its rhythmic notation. This revised version was finished in 1947, first played at a private concert in Hollywood conducted by the composer on January 30, 1948, and published in 1952.

Stravinsky explained that "the title 'SYMPHONY' given to this short work must not be taken in the usual sense of the word. There are various short sections in close tempo relations, succeeding one another, and some rhythmic dialogues between separate woodwind instruments, such as flute and clarinet." "Symphony" here does not connote the traditional Classic-Romantic form, but is rather intended to be taken in its original, 17th-century sense, indicating simply a "sounding together" of instruments. Stravinsky characterized the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* as "an austere ritual which is unfolded in terms of short litanies between different groups of homogeneous instruments.... According to my idea, the homage that I intended to pay to the memory of the great musician ought not to be inspired by his musical thought; on the contrary, I desired rather to express myself in a language which should be essentially my own." With its brittle sonorities, acerbic harmonies and crystalline textures, the *Symphonies* is one of the earliest examples of the Neo-Classic style that was to be found in Stravinsky's music for the following three decades. Though the formal details of the work's organization are intricate, in broad outline it falls into two large paragraphs. The first section comprises many short, juxtaposed sections in mixed meters that contrast the sound of the full wind ensemble with duets or trios for the woodwinds. (Paul Griffiths noted that "in terms of rhythmic engineering, [this section] makes up a pocket *Rite of Spring*.") The closing portion of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is the broad chorale of almost static harmonies written in Debussy's memory. Noting the transparent sound and the mosaic-like construction of this piece, Stravinsky's biographer Eric Walter White commented, "The *Symphonies* is like a carpet woven out of a number of differently colored threads."

Original from ...explosante-fixe...

for flute and ensemble

Pierre Boulez (b. 1925)

Pierre Boulez first made a noise in the musical world in 1945, just after World War II ended, when he led a group of Messiaen's students in a noisy demonstration from the upper regions of the *Théâtre du Champs-Élysées* following the European premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *Four Norwegian Moods*. Boulez, an ardent 20-year-old disciple of the serialism of Arnold Schoenberg, who was then held to be Stravinsky's antagonist in both technique and aesthetics, said that he did not intend the

ruckus as a personal affront to the revered composer of *The Rite of Spring*, but as an attack on “the Establishment, which considered him the God, the Idol, the Only Truth. I did it to draw attention to Schoenberg, whose influence was still limited to Vienna and Berlin.” Boulez, who aspired to set an example for his own generation as Stravinsky had for his three decades before, continued to speak and write against the older composer, asserting that Stravinsky’s “Neo-Classical” return to the principles of earlier eras in the 1920s stymied artistic growth. “If a work advances the language, it is good; if it does not, it is bad,” he told a *Time* magazine interviewer in 1950. “History is much like a guillotine. If a composer is not moving in the right direction he will be killed, metaphorically speaking. The evolution of music, and everything else, for that matter, depends on people who are gifted enough to understand that change is an absolutely irreversible process.”

Boulez and Stravinsky first met in December 1951 in New York at a dinner party in the Chelsea Hotel apartment of critic and composer Virgil Thomson. “Everyone there expected trouble because of Boulez’s repeated and violent attacks on Stravinsky,” Thomson recalled. “That didn’t happen. The two hit like comets. They sat together at dinner.... Before leaving, Stravinsky invited Boulez to visit him the next day.” Stravinsky and Boulez, recognizing in each other not only genius but also a mutual dedication to leading music into unexplored venues, found more than simple rapprochement in their encounters, and they developed a warm association during the following years—Stravinsky called Boulez’s *Le marteau sans maître* “one of the few significant works of the post-war period of experimentation”; Boulez became a leading conductor of Stravinsky’s early music.

Though their relationship had cooled somewhat by the time of Stravinsky’s death, in April 1971, Boulez still readily accepted the request of the British music journal *Tempo* to join 15 other leading composers in contributing to a series of “Canons and Epitaphs” to be published in Stravinsky’s memory. “I began to think about the work in August 1971, soon after receiving the commission,” Boulez said. “That month I visited a castle in Scotland that had once belonged to the Duchess of Argyll. The woman who invited me had with her a son. The young man played the flute as an amateur, and he improvised in this empty 18th-century castle. It was quite impressive. I had the idea then of the work beginning with a flute solo.” What Boulez submitted, however, was not a finished composition but rather a sort of schematic with two pages of unorchestrated notation containing a seven-note cell (originel—“original”) and seven fragments (transitoire—“transitory, transition”) developed from it; six pages of instructions suggested how the fragments might be “assembled” into a performable work. Boulez titled this concept piece *...explosante-fixe...* (“...Fixed Explosion...”) after a line in the 1928 novel *Nadja* by the surrealist writer André Breton. “The line,” Boulez recalled, “was ‘la beauté will be explosante-fixe or it will not be.’ It was a beautiful poetic image which remained with me—independently floating.” Boulez has since made several realizations of *...explosante-fixe...*, all featuring flute with accompaniments ranging from chamber ensemble to full orchestra, sometimes with electronics. Like the other pieces derived from *...explosante-fixe...*, *Originel* of 1991–1993 is characterized by exquisite instrumental luminosity, breath-length phrases (movement-pause: *explosante-fixe*), subtle recycling of its motives, and allusions at important points to the pitch E-flat—“Es,” the first letter of Stravinsky’s name, in German notation.

Siegfried Idyll

Richard Wagner (1813–1883)

Few moments in Richard Wagner’s life were ruled by tenderness—he was almost certainly the meanest and most self-centered of all the great composers, rivaled perhaps only by Jean-Baptiste Lully, who ruthlessly quashed the careers of potential rivals for three decades with the blessing of Louis XIV. The only cell of Wagner’s life that consistently elicited any soft emotions from him was the relationship with his second wife, Cosima, and the family they reared together. The *Siegfried Idyll* is touching testimony to Wagner’s domestic happiness.

Cosima Liszt, daughter of the redoubtable Franz and the Countess Marie d’Agoult, was born on December 24, 1837, at Bellagio, on Lake Como. She was raised among Europe’s cultural elite, and chose for a husband the brilliant pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow. They were married on August 18, 1857, and settled in Munich, where Bülow became one of Wagner’s most ardent disciples. Wagner, unhappy in a childless marriage to Minna Planer, noticed Cosima, too much, it seems,

and they became lovers in the summer of 1864. They conceived a child, born the following August, and brazenly named her Isolde. Bülow, who conducted the premiere of *Tristan* two months later, acknowledged the child as his own. In 1867, a second daughter, Eva, was born of the liaison. Minna died that same year. Bülow again accepted the baby; in June of the following year, he premiered *Die Meistersinger*. The local uproar forced Wagner to retreat from Munich, and he took a house in Switzerland at Tribschen overlooking Lake Lucerne, where Cosima frequently came for extended visits. She left Bülow for good in November 1868, and joined Wagner at Tribschen. ("If it had been anyone but Wagner, I would have shot him," was Bülow's resigned comment.) In March 1869, Wagner resumed work on the *Ring*, dormant for 11 years. A third child, Siegfried, was born at Tribschen on June 6th; Bülow's divorce was final in July; Cosima and Wagner were married in August. "She has defied every disapprobation and has taken upon herself every condemnation," Wagner wrote of his new wife. "She has borne me a wonderfully beautiful boy, whom I boldly call Siegfried; he is now growing, together with my work; he gives me a new, long life, which has at last attained a meaning. Thus we get along without the world, from which we have wholly withdrawn."

It was Cosima who started the family tradition of celebrating birthdays with a bit of Hausmusik. On Richard's birthday in 1869 (May 22nd), he was awakened by a musician blasting Siegfried's horn call outside his bedroom door at dawn. The following year, Cosima assembled a military band of 55 players in the grounds of Tribschen to serenade her husband with his own *Huldigungsmarsch*. To return the kindness, Wagner wrote a chamber orchestra piece during November 1870 as a surprise for Cosima's birthday, celebrated since her childhood on Christmas, a day after the actual date. He gave the score to the young Hans Richter, who was to be the first music director of Bayreuth, who copied out the parts, traveled to Zurich to engage musicians, and arranged rehearsals for December 11 and 21 in that city. (Cosima was a bit unsettled by her husband's unexplained absences on those dates, but kept her peace.) The musicians arrived at Lucerne early on Christmas Eve, when Wagner held a final rehearsal in the *Hôtel du Lac*. The next morning, a Sunday, the small band of 15 musicians—four violins, two violas (one played by Richter, who also handled the few trumpet measures in the last pages), cello, bass, flute, oboe, bassoon, and pairs of clarinets and horns—tuned in the kitchen, quietly set up their music stands on the narrow staircase leading to Cosima's bedroom, with Wagner on the top landing, and began their music at exactly 7:30.

"I can give you no idea, my children, about that day, nor about my feelings," Cosima wrote in the diary she left for her family. "As I awoke, my ear caught a sound, which swelled fuller and fuller; no longer could I imagine myself to be dreaming: music was sounding, and such music! When it died away, Richard came into my room with the children and offered me the score of the symphonic birthday poem. I was in tears, but so were all the rest of the household." Wagner had inscribed the score, "*Tribschen Idyll*, with Fidi's Bird-Song and Orange Sunrise, presented as a Symphonic Birthday Greeting to his Cosima by her Richard, 1870." "Fidi" was Siegfried's nickname; Wagner heard a bird song—"Fidi's bird song"—at the moment of the boy's birth, noted it down, and used it in this piece; the "orange sunrise" was the memory of the dawn light washing the walls on Siegfried's first morning. The new piece was played twice again that day, separated by a performance of Beethoven's *Sextet*. The "*Tribschen Idyll*" remained strictly a family affair until the financial distress caused by Wagner's extravagant lifestyle forced him to give it a public performance, at Meiningen on March 10, 1877, and sell the score for publication a year later, when it was titled *Siegfried Idyll*. "My secret treasure has become everybody's property," Cosima lamented.

Wagner incorporated into this orchestral lullaby the German children's song *Schlaf, mein Kind* ("Sleep, My Child"), his son's "Bird Song," some newly composed strains, and two motives from the opera *Siegfried*, to which he was applying the finishing touches at the end of 1870. The *Siegfried* themes were apparently taken from a projected string quartet that Wagner had promised to write for Cosima at the beginning of their relationship, but never finished. (Some truth seekers of small poetic vision have questioned this romantic story by asserting that none of this quartet ever existed as more than part of Wagner's powerful imagination, and that these motives were originally written for the opera.) At any rate, the *Siegfried Idyll*, as Sir Donald Tovey observed, is "connected with the opera only by a private undercurrent of poetic allusion." It is best heard without making

programmatic associations, instead simply enjoying its still sweetness and its “rainbow-coloured orchestration.”

Chamber Symphony No. 1
for 15 Instruments, Op. 9
Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)

Despite the ferocious charges of malevolent modernity that were hurled at him, Arnold Schoenberg always insisted that he was, in his own words, an “evolutionary rather than a revolutionary composer”—that he was simply and logically carrying forward the great German musical tradition that extended back from Brahms and Reger, through Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart, to Schütz and Lasso. Schoenberg’s early works (*Pelleas und Melisande*, *Gurrelieder*, *Verklärte Nacht*) showed his thorough assimilation of the grandiloquent post-Romantic style, with its extended chromaticism, gigantic orchestras and hyper-emotional expression. After a number of scores (the *Five Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 16; *Pierrot Lunaire*; *Erwartung*) in which traditional tonality was replaced by dependence on motivic cells to create formal unity, he formulated his doctrine of “Composing with Twelve Tones,” which systematized the selection of each melodic and harmonic pitch. The development of his art was logical, clear, and, so he held, inevitable, and there is no more fascinating study in all of music to demonstrate the awesome ability of the human intellect to draw order and concision out of the infinite choices facing the creative artist.

The First Chamber Symphony of 1906 represented a crucial step in Schoenberg’s artistic development. He called it the last work of his early (i.e., post-Romantic) period, but it was also the first of his pieces to use a compositional technique that was to inform his music for the rest of his life. Schoenberg had largely evolved each of his preceding compositions, in the traditional manner, from themes that were presented in the opening sections of a movement. Beginning with the Chamber Symphony, however, he replaced distinct melodies with a small set of intervals that could be continuously unfolded in various permutations and transformations throughout the piece. (The procedure was hardly new. Beethoven did a very similar thing in the first movement of his Fifth Symphony.) The Chamber Symphony stretched traditional tonal harmony to (and sometimes beyond) the point at which keys could be clearly defined, thus forcing texture, melody, and sonority to carry greater importance as form-giving devices. The score’s use of a small orchestra was evidence of Schoenberg’s tendency during the period to move away from the gigantic instrumental forces of his earlier works to more intimate ensembles, though he did arrange the piece for large orchestra in 1935.

The premiere of the Chamber Symphony, like that of most of Schoenberg’s works written in Vienna, caused a near riot, with catcalls, whistles, chair-banging, and ostentatious departures by many of the audience. Gustav Mahler, the powerful director of the Vienna Court Opera and an early champion of Schoenberg, was at the performance, and loudly admonished those who booed, though he later admitted privately a certain puzzlement at the bold new style of his young colleague’s work. “Informed opinion” lashed out at the piece. The critic August Spanuth of the *Berlin Signale* suggested that the score should be retitled *Schreckenammersymphonie*—“Chamber-of-Horrors Symphony.” James Gibbons Huneker wrote inelegantly of the music’s “sharp daggers, paring away tiny slices of the victim’s flesh.” Schoenberg, however, was prepared for the difficult struggle to have his music accepted, and for the slow public and critical realization that his style was not willfully aberrant but was rather a valid artistic expression—that he was indeed, as Aaron Copland once said of him, “emotionally still part of the 19th century.” An interesting anecdote points up Schoenberg’s attitude regarding what he was convinced was his life’s mission. Toward the end of the First World War, he was conscripted (during the week of his 43rd birthday) into the Austro-Hungarian army. He tried to conceal his notoriety from his fellow soldiers, but one persisted in asking, “Aren’t you that controversial modern composer?” “I must admit that I am,” Schoenberg replied. “Somebody had to be, and since no one else wanted to, I took it upon myself.”

The Chamber Symphony, concise in form and concentrated in expression, is a continuous musical span of some 22 minutes divided into several sections indebted to both the conventional four-movement symphony and the classical sonata form. After a few prelude chords, the horn presents the opening (“exposition”) section’s main material, a motive that shoots upward through successive

leaps of the interval of a perfect fourth. Following the presentation of a contrasting group of lyrical figures, a transition leads without pause to an inserted “scherzo with trio.” The sonata structure resumes with an elaborate, contrapuntal development of the motives from the “exposition.” An Adagio of rich texture and deep feeling is interpolated before earlier themes return in the “recapitulation.” The Chamber Symphony concludes with a brilliant and vigorous coda.

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The Orchestre National de Lyon, successor to the Société des Grands Concerts de Lyon (founded in 1903), is proud of its prestigious history, to which conductors of the caliber of André Cluytens, Charles Munch, Ernest Ansermet, Pierre Monteux, Paul Paray, Georges Prêtre, and Otto Ackermann have contributed. In 1969, at the initiative of the Municipality of Lyon, the orchestra became a permanent ensemble of 102 musicians, with Louis Frémaux as its first music director (1969–71).

Since that time, the City of Lyon, which in 1975 provided the orchestra with its own concert hall (the Auditorium de Lyon), has managed and funded the ensemble. Serge Baudo, who succeeded Frémaux in 1971, remained as the orchestra’s music director until 1986, during which time he enhanced the ensemble’s international reputation through its interpretation of French music. Under the guidance of Emmanuel Krivine, music director from 1987 to 1999, the orchestra experienced an artistic renaissance that was hailed by the international press during the ensemble’s tours of the United States, Japan, and Germany.

The arrival of David Robertson as music director in September 2000 has consolidated the orchestra’s position as one of the finest European ensembles. The orchestra regularly works with other internationally renowned conductors, including Kurt Sanderling, Jesús López-Cobos, Elisha Inbal, Neeme Järvi, and Jerzy Semkow, as well as with leading soloists such as Jessye Norman, Martha Argerich, Maria João Pires, Krystian Zimerman, Gidon Kremer, Gil Shaham, Maxim Vengerov, and Yo-Yo Ma.

With a strong commitment to contemporary music, the Orchestre National de Lyon has played host to some of the greatest composers of the 20th century, including Luciano Berio and Krzysztof Penderecki, who have conducted performances of their own music. The orchestra has also given the premieres of works by other leading contemporary composers, from Elliott Carter and Toru Takemitsu to Steve Reich and Pierre Boulez.

The Orchestre National de Lyon and David Robertson have recorded works by the Argentinean composer Alberto Ginastera for the Naïve label, and in 2002, a Bartók CD was released by Harmonia Mundi.

David Robertson (conductor) is recognized internationally as one of the leading conductors of his generation, and continues to impress audiences and critics around the world with his interpretations of the standard orchestral repertoire, his exceptional affinity for 20th-century music, and his command of a broad operatic repertoire. Since 2000, he has been music director of the Orchestre National de Lyon and artistic director of that city’s auditorium, which is home to the orchestra. His appointment marks the first time that one artist has held both musical posts in Lyon.

In addition to his work in Lyon, Robertson’s 2002–03 season includes his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, a two-week re-engagement with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and appearances with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the Israel Philharmonic, and the Sydney Symphony. He also leads productions of Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* and Poulenc’s *La Voix Humaine* with Jessye Norman and the Orchestre National de Lyon at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, and conducts the Orchestre National de Lyon on a tour of the United States, including two concerts at Carnegie Hall. His North American appearances include re-engagements with the Boston Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, and the Saint Louis Symphony, as well as debuts with the Pittsburgh Symphony and the New World Symphony Orchestra.

Robertson has conducted extensively in Europe, having led the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony, the Halle Orchestra, the Bayerisches Staatsorchester (Munich), the NDR Symphony Orchestra (Hamburg), the Berlin Staatskapelle, the La Scala Philharmonic (Milan), the RAI Orchestra (Torino), the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Santa Cecilia Orchestra (Rome), the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Orchestre de Paris, and in Japan, the NHK Symphony. In North America, his appearances in recent seasons include the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Saint Louis Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, and the Houston Symphony. Possessing a wide-ranging operatic repertoire of more than 35 works, he has appeared at a number of prestigious opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Bayerische Staatsoper, the Théâtre du Châtelet, the Hamburg Opera, the Opéra de Lyon, and the San Francisco Opera.

Born in Santa Monica (CA), Robertson was educated at London's Royal Academy of Music, where he studied French horn, composition, and conducting. From 1985–87, he was resident conductor of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, gaining experience in a wide variety of repertoire, including many contemporary works. From 1992–2000, he served as music director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris, founded by Pierre Boulez. In 1997, Robertson was named a recipient of the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductors Award, the premier prize of its kind, given to exceptionally gifted American conductors. In December 1999, Musical America named him Conductor of the Year.

An important aspect of David Robertson's career has been his close connection with student musicians. In addition to leading a number of outreach programs with the Ensemble Intercontemporain and the Orchestre National de Lyon, he has worked with students at the Paris Conservatory, The Juilliard School, the Tanglewood Music Center, and the Aspen Music Festival, where he appears annually.

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