

Orchestre National de Lyon

Saturday, February 1, 2003, 8 pm
Zellerbach Hall

David Robertson, music director and conductor
Leon Fleisher, piano

PROGRAM

Claude Debussy Jeux, Poème dansé

Maurice Ravel Piano Concerto in D major for the Left Hand
Lento – Andante – Allegro – Tempo 1

INTERMISSION

Igor Stravinsky Le Sacre du printemps
The Adoration of the Earth
Introduction – The Augurs of Spring –
Game of Abduction – Spring Round Dances –
Games of the Rival Tribes –
Procession of the Wise Elder –
The Adoration of the Earth – The Wise Elder –
Dance of the Earth
The Sacrifice
Introduction – Mystic Circles of the Young Girls –
Glorification of the Chosen Victim –
Evocation of the Ancestors –
Ritual of the Ancestors – Sacrificial Dance

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Jeux, **Poème dansé**

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

It is perhaps ironic that Sergei Diaghilev and his Ballet Russe hurtled the world of ballet into the modern age with stories of fantasy, exoticism, and antiquity. Diaghilev first stunned the West with his production of Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov in Paris in 1908, and the following season he presented an unprecedented schedule of opera and ballet that included Les Sylphides (to music of Chopin, some of which was orchestrated by Stravinsky), Nikolai Tchernepnin's Le Pavillon d'Armide, Rimsky-Korsakov's The Maid of Pskov, Glinka's Ruslan and Ludmilla, Cléopâtre (a pastiche by six composers), Reynaldo Hahn's Le Dieu bleu (with an Indian setting), Scheherazade (to Rimsky-Korsakov's famous suite of tone-poems), and excerpts from Tchaikovsky's

Sleeping Beauty and Nutcracker, Borodin's Prince Igor, and Glinka's A Life for the Tsar. For the 1910 Ballet Russe season, Diaghilev commissioned Stravinsky to set to music an old Russian legend, The Firebird, and Ravel to put upon the stage Daphnis and Chloé, the lovers of pastoral antiquity. The Diaghilev-Stravinsky alliance was solidified with the 1911 premiere of Petrushka, based on a Russian folk tale; the epochal The Rite of Spring was begun immediately thereafter.

Claude Debussy joined the splendid stable of Diaghilev's composers with the production of the Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun in May 1912 (the music was then already two decades old) for which Nijinsky danced the title role and provided choreography sufficiently lubricious to cause a scandal. Following the publicity-stimulating furor over the Faun, Nijinsky devised a scenario that Diaghilev saw as an opportunity to move the Ballet Russe away from the nymphs and fantasies of his earlier productions toward a bold modernity in subject and treatment—"a plastic vindication of the man of 1913," the impresario called this new direction. Nijinsky's scenario took as its venue the modish game of tennis as the catalyst for a sensual episode of flirtation: "The scene is a garden at dusk; a tennis ball has been lost; a young man and two girls are searching for it. The artificial light of the large electric lamps shedding fantastic rays about them suggests the idea of childish games: they play hide and seek, they try to catch one another, they quarrel, they sulk without cause. The night is warm, the sky is bathed in pale light; they embrace. But the spell is broken by another tennis ball thrown in mischievously by an unknown hand. Surprised and alarmed, the young man and the girls disappear into the nocturnal depths of the garden."

Diaghilev and Nijinsky approached Debussy about composing the music for this thinly veiled erotic gambol, titled Jeux ("Games"). "No," he told them. "It's idiotic and unmusical! I would not dream of writing the score." Changes were made to overcome Debussy's objections to the scenario (a nonsensical plane crash included merely for diversion was eliminated, and Nijinsky, openly homosexual, was dissuaded from a bid to make all the characters male), pleas were issued, and the fee was doubled; Debussy accepted the commission. "In a ballet, any hint of immorality escapes through the feet of the dancers and ends in a pirouette," he rationalized. The score was sketched in the fall of 1912, the orchestration was done quickly between March 28 and April 24, 1913, and Jeux was premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on May 15th, with costumes by Paquin, decor by Bakst, and choreography by Nijinsky; Pierre Monteux conducted. The production was poorly received, a situation that Debussy blamed on the choreographer. "Nijinsky's perverse genius is entirely devoted to peculiar mathematical processes," he wrote to his friend Robert Godet. "The man adds up sixteenth notes with his feet, and proves the result with his arms. It is ugly." Jeux has rarely been staged since.

Despite his initial objections, Jeux proved to be an effective vehicle for Debussy to seek a musical ideal that he defined to the publisher Jacques Durand in a letter of March 1907: "I am more and more convinced that music, by its very nature, is something that cannot be poured into a tight and traditional form. It is made up of colors and rhythms.... The music I desire must be supple enough to adapt itself to the lyrical effusions of the soul and the fantasy of dreams." Jeux, Debussy's last major work for orchestra, is his closest approach to that elusive aspiration. The music—growing freely, organically, with ease and lack of constraint from a score of malleable motives—flows effortlessly through whole-tone, diatonic, and chromatic harmonies and an exquisitely shaped ribbon of continuous, breathing melody that climaxes in the tennis players' mutual kiss near the end of the ballet. The work's effect is due in large part to Debussy's luminous orchestration, which he admitted was strongly influenced by the music of composer André Caplet: "I had to find an orchestration 'without feet.' Don't imagine I mean an orchestra composed entirely of cripples. No! I'm thinking of that orchestral coloring that seems to be lit from behind, and of which there are so many marvelous effects in [Wagner's] Parsifal." In its sensuality of sound and subject, its formal plasticity, and its equivocal allegiance to melodic and harmonic traditions, Jeux is one of Debussy's most dazzling achievements, a presage of a musical modernity that he did not live to fulfill. Noted the British critic David Cox, "Jeux comes nearest to Debussy's long-wished-for ideal of a flexible music which seems not to be written down; it shows a freedom of musical speech, ever varying in colors, shapes, rhythms."

Piano Concerto in D major for the Left Hand Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Maurice Ravel made a triumphant tour of America as pianist and conductor in 1928. Plans were begun almost immediately for a second foray into the New World, and Ravel started work on a piano concerto in 1929 that was to be the centerpiece of the venture. While he was at work on what became the Concerto in G, however, he was asked to compose another concerto by the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, brother of the eminent Austrian philosopher, Ludwig, who was determined to continue his concert career despite the loss of his right arm during the First World War. Wittgenstein had transcribed several piano works for his own performance for left hand alone, and had commissioned new pieces from some of the era's most distinguished composers—Strauss, Prokofiev, Franz Schmidt, Britten,

Hindemith, Korngold. Ravel was intrigued by Wittgenstein's sincerity and by the challenge of the project, and he accepted the proposal. He laid aside the concerto in progress, and took up the new score with enthusiasm.

There were few models for Ravel's task. Saint-Saëns had written *Les Six Etudes pour la main gauche* and Leopold Godowsky had produced *Transcriptions for the Left Hand Alone of the Chopin Etudes*. Alkan and Liapunov had also written left hand studies, and Stravinsky may have brought Scriabin's *Prelude and Nocturne* to Ravel's attention, but Ravel was prowling largely in unexplored territory. Mindful that the *Concerto in G* was still lying unfinished in his desk, he recalled in later years, "It was an interesting experiment to conceive and to realize simultaneously the two concertos. The first ... is a concerto in the most exact sense of the term and is written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns.... The *Concerto for the Left Hand* is of a rather different character." The *Concerto in G* is brilliant and showy, a piece following the traditional 18th-century, Classical concept of the genre. In contrast, the *Concerto for the Left Hand* derives from the intense drama and romanticism of Liszt and the grand gestures of 19th-century music. Laurence Davies allowed that it is "possibly the most serious work in Ravel's entire catalogue."

The opening of the *Concerto for the Left Hand* rises from a barely audible rumbling of the lowest instruments during which two thematic cells are presented: the first, with its snapping rhythmic figures, is intoned by the contrabassoon; the other, appearing in the eighth measure, is a smooth melody presented by the horns in octaves. The two themes are interwoven to achieve a crashing climax from the full orchestra after which the soloist emerges with a cadenza based on the snapping-rhythm theme. Most of the remainder of the opening section is given over to further orchestral elaborations of this melody, with florid figurations from the soloist. The central, "jazzy" section, based on the earlier smooth horn melody, is driving in rhythm and brilliantly brittle in sonority. A scherzo-like strain and a cheeky tune piped by the high woodwinds are followed by the recall of the smooth melody of the beginning, here entrusted to the solo bassoon and then the solo trombone. The jaunty scherzo resumes, but is brought to a sudden halt by a silence and the return of the snapping opening theme in a bold setting for full orchestra. A sweeping cadenza and closing flourishes from the orchestra bring this masterwork of Ravel's maturity to a powerful conclusion.

Le Sacre du printemps

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Stravinsky's conception for *The Rite of Spring*, one of the most influential musical works of the 20th century, came to him as he was finishing *The Firebird* in 1910. He had a vision of "a solemn pagan rite; wise elders, seated in a circle, watching a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring." Stravinsky knew that Nicholas Roerich, a friend who was an archeologist and an authority on the ancient Slavs, would be interested in his idea, and he mentioned it to him. Stravinsky also shared the vision with Serge Diaghilev, impresario of the Ballet Russe, the company that had commissioned *The Firebird*. All three men were excited by the possibilities of the project—Diaghilev promised a production and encouraged Stravinsky to begin work immediately. Having just nearly exhausted himself with the rigors of completing and staging *The Firebird*, however, Stravinsky decided to compose a *Konzertstück* for piano and orchestra as relaxation before undertaking his pagan ballet. This little "concert piece," however, grew into the ballet *Petrushka*, and he could not return to *The Rite* until the summer of 1911.

"What I was trying to convey in *The Rite*," said Stravinsky, "was the surge of spring, the magnificent upsurge of nature reborn." Inspired by childhood memories of spring in Russia, he worked with Roerich to devise a libretto which would, in Roerich's words, "present a number of scenes of earthly joy and celestial triumph as understood by the ancient Slavs." Stravinsky labored feverishly on the score through the winter of 1911–1912, realizing by that time that he was composing an important piece in a startling new style. "I was guided by no system whatever in *The Rite of Spring*," he wrote. "Very little immediate tradition lies behind it. I had only my ear to help me. I heard, and I wrote what I heard. I am the vessel through which *The Rite* passed."

Diaghilev scheduled the premiere for May 1913, and Nijinsky was chosen to do the choreography. Stravinsky, however, objected to Nijinsky's selection because of the dancer's inexperience as a choreographer and his lack of understanding of the technical aspects of the music, but preparations were begun and continued through more than 120 rehearsals. Pierre Monteux drilled the orchestra to the point of anxious readiness. The guests invited to the final dress rehearsal seemed to appreciate the striking modernity of the work, but gave no hint of the donnybrook that was to roar through the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées at the public premiere on May 29th. Almost as soon as the curtain rose, a riot broke out the like of which had not been inspired by a piece of music since Nero's song of antiquity. Shouts, catcalls, whistles, even fisticuffs grew so menacing that often the orchestra could not be heard. Diaghilev flashed the house lights on and off in a vain attempt to restore order; Nijinsky, when he was not on stage, pounded wildly on the scenery with his fists to keep the dancers together; Stravinsky ran out of the auditorium and spent most of the evening backstage pacing in the wings. Somehow, Monteux guided the performance through to the end. Puccini thought *The Rite* "might be the creation of a madman" and the critic of the *New York Sun* nominated the composer as "the cave man of music." No one could deny, however, the ferocious, overwhelming power of the music,

and when audiences began to listen to the work on its own, revolutionary terms, they could not help but be swept away by its awesome and wonderful maelstrom of exquisitely executed sound. Within a year of its stage premiere, Koussevitzky in Russia and Monteux in Paris had conducted concert performances of *The Rite*, and the true value of the work began to be recognized. A somewhat edited version of the score in Disney's animated cartoon movie of 1938, *Fantasia*, brought the music to a wide audience, and its position in the orchestral repertoire was soon secured.

E. W. White summarized the salient stylistic features of *The Rite of Spring* in his exemplary study of the life and works of Stravinsky: "A tremendous internal tension is set up in the score between the simplicity of the thematic material and the discordant complexity of the harmonic texture. This is exacerbated by the instrumentation, highly sophisticated means being employed to get a deliberately primitive effect." The melodic material is often simple and contained within a range of four or five diatonic steps. The score is filled with sharp, often brutal dissonance piled upon the simple melodies and with galvanic rhythms, which Dame Edith Sitwell described as "the beginning of energy, the enormous and terrible shaping of the visible and invisible world through movement." Stravinsky created the work's rhythmic electricity with two compositional techniques: powerful, uneven groupings of beats with irregular accents or meters; and short ostinato rhythms. This latter device charges much of the score with a primitive power unlike any music written before it. The most stunning evidences of the dynamism this technique engenders occur where an ostinato-based wall of sound suddenly collapses into a void of roaring silence. Such abrupt stops are the psychological equivalent of a head-on collision. *The Rite of Spring* is a work of consummate artistry and bold, innovative vision that won for Stravinsky a place among the greatest creative artists in the history of music.

Robert Lawrence, in *The Victor Book of Ballet*, provided the following summary of the stage action: "Dealing with archaic Russian tribes and their worship of the gods of the harvest and fertility, *The Rite of Spring* falls into two separate yet mutually interdependent parts—the Adoration of the Earth and the Sacrifice. These primitive peoples assemble for their yearly ceremonies, play their traditional games, and finally select a virgin to be sacrificed to the gods of Spring so that the crops and tribes may flourish.

"There is a prelude in which the composer evokes the primitive past, when man was in intimate contact with nature. A soft bassoon solo, played high on the instrument to produce a strange tone quality, opens the work—like an immemorial chant heard far off. The curtain rises on a savage daylight picture of an ancient land. Insistent, barbaric rhythms are heard in the orchestra. A group of adolescents appears, and dance until other members of the tribe enter. Then the full round of ceremonies gets under way: a mock abduction, games of the rival tribes, the procession of the Sage, and the thunderous dance of the Earth. The curtain falls, and the orchestra plays a soft interlude representing the pagan night.

"Soon the tribal meeting place is seen again. This time, it is dark and the adolescents circle mysteriously in preparation for the choice of the virgin to be sacrificed to the gods. Suddenly their dance is interrupted, and one of the girls who has taken part is marked for the tribal offering. The others begin a wild orgy glorifying the Chosen One and call on the shades of their ancestors. Finally the supreme moment of the ceremony arrives: the ordeal of the Chosen One. It is the maiden's duty to dance until she perishes from exhaustion. Throughout the dance, the music keeps gathering power through the element of frenzied repetition until finally it spins like a top on its own axis, and ends with a crash as the Maiden dies."

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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, Gidon Kremer, 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 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 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, and conducts the orchestra 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, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony, the Halle Orchestra, the Bayerisches Staatsorchester (Munich), the NDR Symphony Orchestra (Hamburg), and the La Scala Philharmonic (Milan). 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, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Possessing a wide-ranging operatic repertoire, he has appeared at a number of prestigious opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, the Bayerische Staatsoper, and the San Francisco Opera.

Born in Santa Monica (CA), Robertson was educated at London's Royal Academy of Music. 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. 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.

Leon Fleisher (piano), a native of San Francisco, gave his first public recital at age 8. One year later, he became a student of the legendary Artur Schnabel. In 1944, at age 16, Fleisher made his debut with the New York Philharmonic under Pierre Monteux. He then went on to become the first American to win the Queen Elisabeth International Competition in Belgium. Regular appearances on the world's great concert stages followed, and his celebrated collaboration with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra resulted in recordings that have remained touchstones of the classical catalogue to this day.

Midway through the 1964–65 season, Fleisher's illustrious career was interrupted by the onset of a debilitating ailment affecting his right hand, later diagnosed as focal dystonia. During the intervening years, he devoted his musical activities to teaching, to conducting (which he has pursued actively since 1967), and, eventually, to the left-hand alone piano literature. His performances and recordings of the repertoire for the left hand, beginning in the 1980s, won him immediate acclaim, as well as two Grammy nominations for his Sony Classical recordings. It was in 1995, at a concert with the Cleveland Orchestra, that Fleisher was able to play the Mozart Concerto in A major, K. 414, successfully with both hands again. He now performs both the left-hand repertoire and select works for two hands.

Over the past few seasons, Fleisher has performed the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 1 with the San Francisco Symphony (under Michael Tilson Thomas), the Orchestre de Paris (under Carlo Maria Giulini), the Berlin Staatsoper Orchestra (under Daniel Barenboim), and the Chicago Symphony (under Ivan Fischer), among other orchestras. He has also continued to play the Mozart Concerto K. 414 with such orchestras as the Boston Symphony, the Chicago Symphony (at Ravinia), the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (which he also conducted), and the Ravel Concerto for Left Hand with the Toronto Symphony, the BBC Symphony,

and the Orchestre de Paris (as soloist on its European tour in the fall of 1997). His recitals, which recently included appearances in Vienna and London (Wigmore Hall), combine two-hand and left-hand alone repertoire.

Other highlights of recent seasons include a performance of Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto in Baltimore and New York, and a chamber music tour with the Fleisher-Jolley-Tree Trio in 2001-02.

Fleisher's reputation as a conductor was quickly established when he founded the Theatre Chamber Players at the Kennedy Center in 1967. He made his New York conducting debut at the 1970 Mostly Mozart Festival and in 1973 became associate conductor of the Baltimore Symphony. Since that time, he has conducted numerous orchestras, including the Boston Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the San Francisco Symphony, among others. He also had a regular association with the New Japan Philharmonic as its principal guest conductor.

Holder of the Andrew W. Mellon Chair at the Peabody Conservatory of Music since 1959, Fleisher also serves on the faculties of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. From 1986-97, he was artistic director of the Tanglewood Music Center. Teaching activities have been an important element of his activities at the Aspen, Lucerne, Ravinia and Verbier festivals, among others. He has also given master classes throughout the world.

Leon Fleisher holds honorary doctorates from The Juilliard School, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. In 1994, Musical America named him "Instrumentalist of the Year." He has also received the Johns Hopkins University's President's Medal. Fleisher received the Decoration of Commander in the Order of King Leopold II from the Belgian Government in 2000. In April of the same year, he became the first living pianist to be inducted into the Classical Music Hall of Fame.

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