

## Program notes for January 29<sup>th</sup> 2022

### **KRUPA**

#### **PROGRAM NOTE by Maestro Fouad Fakhouri, the composer**

Eugene Krupa is considered by many as the drummer who ushered the modern day drum set and elevated the role of the drummer from simply playing accompanying rhythms to becoming a solo instrumentalist on par with any member of the band. His energy and flare during his “Sing Sing Sing” performance with the Benny Goodman Band is considered a milestone in the world of drumming.

As a young boy, when I first heard a recording of his “Sing Sing Sing” performance, I was mesmerized by the energy, the savage drive, and the raw jungle-like feeling behind his rhythmic patterns. *KRUPA* is an homage to the style of the late drummer.

In *KRUPA* the performer playing the drum set performs his part in the manner of the famed drummer and attempts to capture the essence of his playing and showmanship against the backdrop of the full orchestra.

### **Aram Khachaturian, Violin Concerto**

Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978) was a Soviet Armenian composer who incorporated elements of Armenian folk music into his compositions. He grew up in Tblisi, then moved to Moscow in 1921 to study biology. Subsequently he studied musical composition, orchestration, and harmony at the Moscow Conservatory, and in 1932 he became a member of the Composers’ Union. His musical style fit well into the Soviet doctrine of Socialist Realism, being tuneful, upbeat, and easily accessible. Among his musical friends was the violin virtuoso David Oistrakh (1908-1974), who advised Khachaturian about technical aspects of the Violin Concerto, then gave the premiere in 1940 and continued to champion it throughout his career. The concerto is dedicated to Oistrakh.

The Violin Concerto is traditional in many ways, with three movements (fast, slow, fast), sonata form in the first, and a large orchestra including English horn, various percussion instruments, and harp. Like many Romantic multi-movement works, themes from the earlier movements return in the finale, making the concerto cyclic. The most unusual element for listeners used to classical music is the use of folk scales, both melodically (many solo violin scale passages make them easy to identify) and harmonically. Khachaturian said that elements of his harmonic style derived from the tuning of folk instruments and their overtones, which resulted in harmonies being built from 2nds, 4ths, and 5ths, rather than the 3rds of major and minor chords.

The first movement is built around two contrasting themes, the first an energetic repetitive solo violin melody which fits the tempo marking *Allegro, con fermezzo* (fast and firmly). Repetitive figures can be heard throughout the work, and are derived from folk music, where a lot of fast notes repeat so that the overall movement (gradually rising for example) happens much more

slowly. The second theme introduces another folk element, that of ornamentation that gives the impression of improvisation. The tempo slows, the mood is relaxed, and rhythms are more flexible. In the development these two themes are combined before leading into a long cadenza for the soloist, then an abbreviated return of the two main themes and an energetic coda.

The second movement opens with low emerging bassoons with low strings playing *sul ponticello* (bowing very near the bridge for a scratchy sound), leading to a slow waltz accompaniment. The solo violin plays in regular phrases with seemingly casual ornamentation of the melody, and is accompanied by a reduced orchestra, often only strings. Even when the music is at its most intense it rarely feels urgent. There is a notable change of texture when the violas take on the solo line, with all violins silent. The soloist re-enters muted and the music whispers to an end.

The finale begins vigorously, like an extremely energetic dance, and repeated phrases are common. Themes from the slow movement (with a vigorous rhythm underpinning the slower ornamental melody) and the first movement return as the music drives towards a forceful finish.

### **Franck, Symphony in D Minor**

César Franck (1822-1890) was born in Liège, now in Belgium, then spent most of his life in France after the family moved to Paris in 1835. At the Paris Conservatoire he studied piano, organ, counterpoint, and composition. He then made his living as a church organist, was famous for his improvisations, composed mainly church music, and acquired a group of devoted students. In 1872 he became a professor of organ at the Conservatoire, and his compositions became increasingly successful, winning various awards. He composed his only symphony between 1886 and 1888; it was first performed in 1889 at the Paris Conservatoire. Other compositions from the last decade of his life include the popular Violin Sonata (often arranged for other instruments), the Piano Quintet, and the Symphonic Variations.

The Symphony in D Minor has some untraditional aspects, which perhaps accounted for the unenthusiastic reception at its premiere. It is in three movements rather than the usual four, with the second substituting for both the slow movement and scherzo usually in symphonies. Franck also used a “motto” theme, a short motive of three notes that is modified in various ways throughout the symphony. This makes the symphony cyclic as it ties all the movements together with the same motif. Another way he achieves that close connection is by revisiting themes from the first two movements in the finale.

In traditional symphonies, the slow introduction of a first movement is independent of the sonata-form fast movement, but here Franck integrates his into the overall sonata form. It is heard three times, twice at the beginning (with a brief fast section in between) then it returns a third time as the beginning of the recapitulation, matching what happened at the beginning. The motto begins both the slow introduction and the fast section. While Franck’s harmonies are chromatic chords typical of the late Romantic period, his key choices are not. He takes the

music through some unexpected keys, for instance F minor when the listener expects D minor near the beginning, and even more surprisingly, E-flat minor at the start of the *allegro* in the recapitulation, which would also traditionally be D minor.

The most important thematic elements in the first movement are the motto figure and a later melody that oscillates around a single pitch, so that it feels very stable and is also singable. Both melodies are material for the development section. A new feature in the recapitulation section is the use of canon, in which some instruments copy what others have just played, like singing a round. The recapitulation begins *fortissimo* with the motto in canon between high and low brass, and the coda takes this further to *fff* with the motto in canon again, to end the movement in D major.

The slow movement is now famous for its English horn solo, although at the time of the first performance the choice of instrument came under criticism. In hindsight it is one of the solos that has given the instrument its reputation as having a Romantic tone color. Some five years later Antonín Dvořák wrote an even better known English horn solo in his *Symphony From the New World*, which cemented its Romantic reputation. In Franck's slow movement the English horn plays a flowing melody accompanied by *pizzicato* strings and harp. It is heard many times, sometimes with a countermelody, sometimes without, with varied accompaniments, most often very sustained but also in a detached style. Other significant melodic interest comes from a scalar motive with uneven rhythms.

The finale in D major bursts in with a syncopated catchy tune in cellos and bassoons which incorporates the motto. The English horn melody from the slow movement returns along with material from the first movement. Eventually the derivation of the syncopated tune from the oscillating melody is made clear, and the work ends with the full orchestra playing *fortissimo*.

Jane Girdham