SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
A JACOBS MASTERWORKS CONCERT
Johannes Debus, conductor

November 11 and 12, 2017

JEAN PHILIPPE RAMEAU Selections from Les Indes galantes
Ouverture
Musette En Rondeau
Deuxième Air pour les Bostangis
Air des Incas pour la Devotion du Soleil
Menuets
Air pour les Esclaves Africains
Air pour les amants qui suivent Belloone, et pour les amantes qui tachent de les retenir
Tambourins

MAURICE RAVEL Piano Concerto in G Major
Allegramente
Adagio assai
Presto
Louis Lortie, piano

INTERMISSION

GABRIEL FAURÉ Suite from Pelléas et Mélisande, Op. 80
Prélude
Entr’acte: Fileuse (The Spinner)
Sicilienne
La mort de Mélisande (The Death of Melisande)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY Ibéria, No. 2 from Images
Par les rues et par les Chemins (In the Streets and Byways)
Les parfums de la nuit (The Fragrances of the Night)
Le matin d’un jour de fête (The Morning of a Festival Day)
Selections from *Les Indes galantes*
JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU
Baptized September 25, 1683, Dijon
Died September 12, 1764, Paris

Jean-Philippe Rameau made his reputation as a harpsichordist and theorist, and then at age 50 he did something that sent his career (and life) in an entirely new direction: he wrote an opera. *Hyppolyte et Aracia* may have been a commercial failure, but at this point Rameau had been bitten by the bug. Over the rest of his life he wrote 20 more operas, in the process becoming France’s leading opera composer.

If Rameau’s first opera was a failure, his second was a striking success. *Les Indes galantes*, produced in Paris on August 23, 1735, was an *opéra-ballet*, a form that combined singing and dancing. That title has been variously translated as “The Amorous Indies” or “The Courtly Indies,” and in its final form *Les Indes galantes* consisted of a *Prologue* and four *entrées* (essentially, acts), each of which has an individual name, is set in an exotic foreign location and tells a different love story. In the *Prologue*, youthful warriors from France, Italy, Spain and Poland are called together by Hebe (Youth) and Cupid (Love), but they choose to forsake love and go off to seek military glory in exotic lands (the “Indies” of the opera’s title). Forsaken, Cupid decides to visit those lands herself and thus provides the context for the following four love stories. *The Generous Turk*, set on an island in the Indian Ocean, tells of the slave girl Emile who escapes her pasha to be reunited with her lover Valère. In *The Incas of Peru*, set at the foot of a volcano in Peru, the princess Phani chooses the Spaniard Don Carlos over the Peruvian Huascar, whose treachery is rewarded by his being buried beneath lava from the volcano. The third *entrée* – titled *The Flowers, Persian Festival* – revolves around two young men, each of whom loves the other’s slave. The plot (too complicated to explain here or anywhere) eventually ends happily for all concerned. *The Savages*, set in North America, once again features an Indian princess, this time named Zima. Forced to choose between a Spanish and a French suitor, she rejects both and chooses her Indian lover, the noble Adario. Featuring Rameau’s powerful music, spectacular settings and lavish sets, *Les Indes galantes* proved a great success: it was given 64 times in Paris in the two years after its premiere.

The opera is rarely staged today, but many have felt that Rameau’s music is too good to lose. French composer Paul Dukas was the first (1925) to draw a suite of orchestral excerpts
from Les Indes galantes, and since then conductors have felt free to assemble their suites of excerpts. At this concert Johannes Debus leads a selection of eight movements, arranged not as they occur in the opera but to provide a varied concert experience. Six of these movements come from the opera’s Prologue. The binary-form Ouverture is suitably firm at its beginning, then races ahead in the second section. The Musette en Rondeau, with its constant drone, is one of the dances at Hebe’s opening festival, as is the Deuxième air pour les Bostangis, which dances vigorously along its 6/8 meter. The Air des Incas pour la Devotion du Soleil is the only one of these selections from opera’s second act; marked Gravement, this solemn music accompanies the Incas’ ceremony to welcome the sun. The following three excerpts are all once again from the Prologue, beginning with a pair of attractive Menuets. Next comes the rough Air pour les Esclaves Africains; the slaves’ music is powerful, and the marking here is Lourdement (“heavily”). The Air pour les amants qui suivent Belloone makes sharp contrast between two kinds of music: the fast beginning and a tender response. This suite of movements concludes with the one selection from The Generous Turk, a pair of Tambourins that dance cheerfully as they bring that act to its conclusion.

Piano Concerto in G Major
MAURICE RAVEL
Born March 7, 1875, Pyrennes, Basses-Cibourre
Died December 28, 1937, Paris

Throughout his career Ravel had written no concertos, and then in the fall of 1929 – at the age of 54 – he set to work simultaneously on two piano concertos. One was the Concerto for the Left Hand for the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, and the other – the Concerto in G Major – was intended for the composer’s own use. The Concerto for the Left Hand is dark and serious, but the Concerto in G Major is much lighter. Ravel described it as “a concerto in the truest sense of the term, written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns. Indeed, I take the view that the music of a concerto can very well be cheerful and brilliant and does not have to lay claim to profundity or aim at dramatic effect…At the beginning I thought of naming the work a divertissement; but I reflected that this was not necessary, the title ‘Concerto’ explaining the character of the music sufficiently.”

The actual composition took longer than Ravel anticipated, and the concerto was not
complete until the fall of 1931. By that time, failing health prevented the composer from performing this music himself. Instead, he conducted the premiere in Paris on January 14, 1932. The pianist was Marguerite Long, to whom Ravel dedicated the concerto. (Long had given the first performance of Ravel’s *Le tombeau de Couperin* in 1919.)

Ravel may have taken Mozart and Saint-Saëns as his model, but no listener would make that association. What strikes audiences first are the concerto’s virtuoso writing for both piano and orchestra, the brilliance and transparency of the music and the influence of American jazz. It is possible to make too much of the jazz influence, but Ravel had heard jazz during his tour of America in 1928 and found much to admire. When asked about its influence on this concerto, he said: “It includes some elements borrowed from jazz, but only in moderation.” Ravel was quite proud of this music and is reported to have said that in this work “he had expressed himself most completely, and that he had poured his thoughts into the exact mold that he had dreamed.”

The first movement, marked *Allegramente* (“Brightly”), opens with a whipcrack, and immediately the piccolo plays the jaunty opening tune, picked up in turn by solo trumpet before the piano makes its sultry solo entrance. Some of the concerto’s most brilliant music occurs in this movement, which is possessed of a sort of madcap energy, with great splashes of instrumental color, strident flutter-tonguing by the winds, string glissandos and a quasi-cadenza for the harp. The *Adagio assai*, one of Ravel’s most beautiful slow movements, opens with a three-minute solo for the pianist, who lays out the haunting main theme at length. The return of this theme later in the movement in the English horn over delicate piano accompaniment is particularly effective. Despite its seemingly easy flow of melody, this movement gave Ravel a great deal of trouble, and he later said that he wrote it “two bars at a time.” The concluding *Presto* explodes to life with a five-note riff that recurs throughout, functioning somewhat like the ritornello of the baroque concerto. The jazz influence shows up here in the squealing clarinets, brass smears and racing piano passages. The movement comes to a sizzling conclusion on the five-note phrase with which it began.
Suite from *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Op. 80  
GABRIEL FAURÉ  
Born May 12, 1845, Pamiers  
Died November 4, 1924, Paris

Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* was first produced in Paris on May 17, 1893, and it quickly took the world by storm. A grim medieval romance with Arthurian overtones, *Pelléas et Mélisande* tells the story of Mélisande, who is found wandering in the forest by Golaud, a prince out on a royal hunt. He takes her back to his castle and eventually marries her, but Golaud’s brother Pelléas is strongly attracted to Mélisande as well. Golaud becomes suspicious, and although Pelléas and Mélisande have decided to see each other no more, Golaud kills Pelléas, and Mélisande dies after giving birth to a child.

It is difficult to convey how powerfully this tale – full of doomed love and an evocation of a misty and more romantic past – influenced the younger generation at the turn of the century, particularly the younger generation of composers. Debussy saw the play in 1893 and immediately began work on his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which he finished in 1902. Schoenberg composed a symphonic poem with the same title in 1902-03, and Sibelius wrote a suite of incidental music for a production of the play in Helsinki in 1905. Fauré was ahead of all these distinguished contemporaries: he was asked to write incidental music for the London premiere of Maeterlinck’s play in 1898. Working quickly (he re-used some music he had written earlier and enlisted his student Charles Koechlin to help with the orchestration), Fauré composed 17 short movements that were performed as part of the London premiere on June 21, 1898.

From his incidental music, Fauré drew an orchestral suite of four movements, this time orchestrating all the music himself. The suite is marked by unusual restraint. There are no dramatic outbursts, no explosions of orchestral sound, no precise depictions of action. Instead, Fauré’s music projects a mood of somber and poised beauty, a subdued atmosphere equivalent to the emotional events of Maeterlinck’s play. The four movements of the suite roughly follow the action of the play. The opening movement – *Prélude: Quasi adagio* – accompanies the beginning of the play, and its quiet beauty perfectly sets the tone for the events that follow. Near the end a French horn sounds the hunting call associated with Golaud’s hunt in the forest. The second movement, titled *Fileuse* and originally the entr’acte to Act III, accompanies a scene in which Mélisande is seen spinning (*fileuse* is the French word for “spinner”). Flowing triplets in
the violins mark the sound of her spinning, and above them the solo oboe sings its expressive theme. The third movement, *Sicilienne*, has become one of Fauré’s most popular works, especially in its arrangements for flute and for cello. A sicilienne is a dance in swaying rhythm, usually in a minor key; its name suggests the place of its origin. The final movement – *The Death of Mélisande: Adagio molto* – serves as an introduction to the final act of the play. Darkest of the four movements, it warns the audience of the events about to unfold.

*Ibéria*, No. 2 from *Images*
CLAUDE DEBUSSY
Born August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye
Died March 25, 1918, Paris

In 1905, shortly after completing *La mer*, Debussy set to work on a piece he called *Images*, which he thought would be for two pianos. Each of its three sections was to be based on the music of a different country – England, Spain and France – and he told his publisher he expected to have them done quickly. But *Images* became instead an extended work for orchestra, and it took much longer than Debussy expected: the cycle was not complete until 1912. The second section – *Ibéria*, a musical evocation of Spain in three colorful movements – has become one of Debussy’s most popular orchestral works and is usually performed separately, as it is on this concert.

The apparently universal love for Spain among French composers has shown up clearly in their music: in Bizet’s *Carmen*, Lalo’s *Symphonie espagnole*, Chabrier’s *España*, Ravel’s *Rapsodie espagnole* and *Boléro*, and countless other examples. Debussy shared this enthusiasm, though his direct experience of Spain consisted of one three-hour excursion across the border to visit San Sebastian, but that was apparently enough: *Ibéria* has been hailed as one of the greatest examples of a distinctly “Spanish” music. Manuel de Falla said that this music “seems to float in a lucid atmosphere with sparkling light; the intoxicating spell of Andalusian nights, the brightness of a feasting people dancing to the merry chords of the banda of guitars and bandurrias…everything whirling in the air, approaching and fading away…”

Each of the three movements of *Ibéria* has a descriptive title. *In the Streets and Byways* is full of energy and hard-edged rhythms underlined by clicking castanets. This movement offers striking solos for clarinet, English horn, viola, a virtuoso entrance by the entire horn section and sultry trombone glissandos; after all the excitement, it flickers out on a few strokes of quiet
percussion.

_The Fragrances of the Night_, a habanera, is the most exotic-sounding movement – Debussy marks it “Soft and dreamy.” Colors are muted in this movement, in the unusual key of F-sharp Major. This is music of the perfumed night, full of languorous melodies, subtle touches of instrumental timbre and fluid rhythms.

Debussy was especially proud of the transition from the second movement to the third, _The Morning of a Festival Day_, which he said “doesn’t sound as if it has been written down” – he wanted the effect of the music being improvised on the spot. His marking for this movement is unique: “In the rhythm of a distant march, alert and joyous.” The expectant feeling of early morning at the opening gradually gives way to sunlight and bright color. The main subject sounds as if it is being played by a giant guitar; Debussy emphasizes this visually by having the violinists and violists strum their instruments under their arms rather than placing them under their chins. This music is remarkable in Debussy’s output for its attempt to paint detailed scenes – “there are melon sellers and whistling urchins whom I see very clearly,” he said. At one point the march interrupts a street fiddler and thrusts him aside, and then with a sudden rush (“Fast and nervous”) the music blazes to a wild finish.

_-Program notes by Eric Bromberger_

**WHY THIS PROGRAM? by Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, Symphony Archivist**

The music by Rameau for his _Les Indes galantes_ is being given its first performance by this orchestra at these concerts. In contrast, Ravel's popular Piano Concerto was first played at these concerts by Nikita Magalof, when Earl Bernard Murray conducted it during the 1966-67 season. Since then, it has been played here 11 times, most recently by Jean-Yves Thibaudet when Jahja Ling led it during the season 2011-12. Debussy's brilliant _Ibéria_ was first programmed here by Earl Bernard Murray, a protégé of the great French conductor, Pierre Monteux, in the 1961-62 season. Surprisingly, I have been unable to find any listing of this incredibly brilliant piece in the orchestra's repertory since then. The lovely music by Fauré from his suite for _Pelléas et Mélisande_ has been performed on two previous occasions by the San Diego Symphony. First, during the summer season of 1958 it was led by Robert Shaw, and again, during the 1973-74 season it was conducted by Robert Zeller.