



University of North Texas Concert Orchestra

Clay Couturiaux, conductor

Gustavo Romero, piano

Wednesday, April 17, 2024
7:30 pm
Winspear Hall
Murchison Performing Arts Center

PROGRAM

Russian Easter Festival Overture,
Opus 36 (1888).....Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

Symphony No. 8 in B minor,
"Unfinished," D. 759 (1822)Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
I. Allegro moderato
II. Andante con moto

--Intermission--

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini,
Opus 43 (1934)..... Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Gustavo Romero, piano

***Eight hundred fifty-first program of the 2023–2024 season
Photography and videography are prohibited***

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908) **Russian Easter Festival Overture, Opus 36 (1888)**

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov: one of the “Mighty Five.” Like the other indomitable composers of that infamous group, he is known primarily for his musical representations of Russian nationalism. Despite the Five’s interest in folk sounds, it took some time for Rimsky-Korsakov to actively pursue liturgical music as a line of nationalist inspiration. After working at the court chapel, Rimsky-Korsakov took a closer look at Russian Orthodoxy’s nationalist potential. His *Russian Easter Festival Overture* of 1888 is one such example of a nationalist work that is grounded in a Russian expression of Christianity.

At this time, Rimsky-Korsakov was famous, but mainly so in his own country. When he composed, he focused more on his fellow Russians rather than catering to a broader European audience. Indeed, his own remarks on the overture can feel alienating to us today: “In order to appreciate my Overture even ever so slightly, it is necessary that the hearer should have attended Easter morning-service at least once and, at that, not in a domestic chapel, but in a cathedral thronged with people from every walk of life with several priests conducting the cathedral service.” Ultimately, Rimsky-Korsakov’s remarks equip us with the potential to imagine such a scenario, and the piece’s enduring renown amongst international audiences demonstrates a broader appeal than he perhaps ever anticipated.

The work premiered under the direction of the composer in December 1888. Drawing on quotes from the Russian Easter liturgies and incorporating orchestral effects based on the Easter soundscape, Rimsky-Korsakov condenses a day of celebration into a single movement in sonata form. The piece begins with a lengthy slow introduction. Contrary to their excited titles, the chants “Let God Arise!” and “The Angel Wailed” are used to depict a mystical and sparse Easter morning. The two chants alternate, with the first melody returning in the unison trombones. Orchestral effects, including muted brass, cadenzas, shimmering strings, and harp arpeggios signal the great solemnity of Easter morning. Here, the composer imagined “the holy sepulcher that had shone with ineffable light at the moment of the resurrection.” This moment then leads to the celebration of Easter—the allegro signals the beginning of the exposition. Church bell effects, vivacious brass, and the melody “Christ is arisen” depict the joyous celebration. But in addition to the representation of a Christian holiday, Rimsky-Korsakov also reveled in what he saw as pagan aspects of the Russian Holy Day—revelry, Easter loaves, candles, and festal pomp. The development is a return to calm piety as a solo trombone intones another chant. Soon, stoic piety gives way to debauchery as the now-familiar themes make their return in a vivacious recapitulation.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s overture offers performers and listeners a wide range of orchestral treats, including numerous solos for trombone, cello, violin, flute, and timpani (among others), inventive orchestral effects, gossamer cadenzas, and sparkling percussion. The brilliant orchestration brings to life many different facets of an Easter celebration, a sonic cornucopia of springtime delight.

NOTES

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Symphony No. 8 in B minor, "Unfinished," D. 759 (1822)

Left incomplete by a composer occupied with other tasks, Franz Schubert's *Symphony No. 8* is an entrancing work that prevents similar distraction in the listener. While the work makes use of time-honored classical forms, its bewitching themes look ahead to the Romantic nineteenth century. Lyrical and memorable melodies are pitted against orchestral outbursts and plaintive doldrums in gripping ways that are hard to anticipate. Its brooding opening and placid end craft a balanced arc that is complementary despite its unfinished state.

The first movement, in B minor, is one of anguish and suffering. Notable more for its emotional impact than its conventional use of sonata form, this movement's abruptly shifting moods take on a nightmarish quality. The brooding opening theme in the low strings—and the mystical woodwind melody that follows—both set the stage for an uneasy journey with no immediate resolution. The secondary theme, a contrasting cello melody in G Major has all the qualities of a dance with none of the joy. Its lyricism, momentum, and buoyancy are nothing more than a short-lived ruse; its levity is a farce. The development begins with the same troubled theme that opened the work. Now in E minor, the theme's familiarity is subverted. The melody is at the same time anchoring and disorienting, begging the question, "Where are we?" The stark contrasts of the exposition are no match for the swirling development with its heightened outbursts and restrained passages of unease. The recapitulation is generally standard fare in terms of its adherence to the progression of the exposition. The woodwind melody returns in B minor, though the dancelike theme is now in D Major. Any relief brought by the familiarity of these themes is soon washed away by a coda that eschews panic and anguish in favor of suspenseful dread.

However, the opening of the slow second movement reveals itself as a panacea; the E Major horn call brings an immediate and assured sense of relief. A modulation to the relative minor ushers in the lyrical secondary theme first on solo clarinet and later, solo oboe. An eddying passage follows the otherwise graceful melody, but it lacks the teeth of the fearful first movement. Ease and contentment reign supreme despite occasional orchestral flare-ups. Both themes return a second time—a sonata form without development. Another stormy passage takes the reins, but tranquil safety returns soon enough. The movement, and thus the symphony, ends quietly in a relaxed E Major, the horrors of the opening long forgotten.

Serge Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Opus 43 (1934)

It is not surprising that Serge Rachmaninoff sought inspiration in one of the most legendary virtuosos of the early Romantic age, but his resulting *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* is anything but predictable. This technical tour-de-force is more than a flashy showpiece; rather than focusing solely on the talents of the performer, our attention is drawn to the wide array of characters that the soloist brings to life. This vast set of variations borrows its theme from Paganini's *Caprice* No. 24 for solo violin, a melody also used by musicians from Johannes Brahms to Benny Goodman. But rather than beginning with a clear statement of the theme, Rachmaninoff skips it in favor of an introductory flourish and the first variation. The theme then follows in the orchestra with pointillistic contributions from the piano. For the next variation, the roles are reversed, and the piano is off to the races. The variations increase in fervor until the sixth variation, which slows the tempo but features no reduction in virtuosity. Lush harmonies and sparkling sixteenth-note figures lead to the understated carillon-like seventh variation. Here, the infamous *Dies irae* chant makes its first appearance in the piano as a modification of the theme; its presence here may inject death into these character pieces, or it could be a simple curiosity. The eighth variation is heavy and grunting while the ninth is insistent and urgent, but it is not until the end of the tenth variation that we are granted a moment to rest.

The enveloping eleventh movement is first dormant and then fluttery, while the thirteenth harkens back to the heft of the eighth and the bell qualities of the seventh. Like the eighth variation, the fourteenth features the *Dies irae* chant in the piano. The longest and most well-known variation of them all is the eighteenth. Here, the piano functions as both singer and accompaniment. A gorgeous song without words, the piano is showcased by itself before the heartfelt strings join with the melody. Both nostalgic and intensely longing, this variation is impassioned and sumptuous. The next four movements grow steadily more frantic and are capped off with a cadenza. Rather than capping off the work with a learned fugue, Rachmaninoff opts for a flashier ending. As the train threatens to fly off the rails, the piano pulls back the momentum to prevent a crash. Once again in control, the piano leads the way to a spectacular conclusion and injects a comical last word.--*Chandler Hall under the direction of Bernardo Illari*

BIOGRAPHIES

Gustavo Romero joined the piano faculty of the University of North Texas College of Music in fall of 2002 after five years serving on the faculty of the University of Illinois, and nine years on the faculty of the Eastern Music Festival in Greensboro, North Carolina. In Spring 2023 he was designated as University Distinguished Research Professor.

His formal training was earned at The Juilliard School, graduating with a bachelor of music in 1988, and a master of music in 1997. In 1989, Romero was the winner of the prestigious Clara Haskill International Piano Competition in Switzerland. Other major awards include the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Musical America Young Artist of 1988, Austin, TX "Key to the City Award," and Maurice Braun Award of the San Diego Historical Society.



Since 1999, Romero has performed numerous complete recital cycles at the Neurosciences Institute in La Jolla, California, including Chopin: The Complete Published Solo Piano Works; Bach: The Leipzig Keyboard Works; and Beethoven: The Complete Piano Sonatas. He has played with Radio France Orchestra, Philharmonica Hungarica, and Liège Philharmonic, and performed concerts in Paris, Zurich, Milan, and Berlin, among other cities. He has appeared at major festivals, including New York's Mostly Mozart Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Montpellier Festival in France. In addition, he recently performed recitals at both the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. and at Alice Tully Hall in New York. Romero has also conducted master classes nationwide, as well as in Europe and South Africa.

His discography includes four Koch International CDs: A REM CD featuring Isaac Albéniz's *Change d'Espagne*; a recording of Claude Debussy's *Images I et II*; and Domenico Scarlatti's *Keyboard Sonatas*.

BIOGRAPHIES

Clay Couturiaux is the assistant director of Orchestral Studies at the University of North Texas where he currently teaches orchestral conducting and is conductor of the UNT Concert Orchestra. The 2023–24 season marks Couturiaux's twelfth season as music director and conductor of the Richardson Symphony Orchestra. Following a distinguished 16-year tenure, he was named conductor laureate of the Monroe Symphony Orchestra in May 2020. He has also served on the faculty of the UNT Summer Strings Institute since 2015.



Maestro Couturiaux has accumulated over three decades of experience conducting professional symphony orchestras and teaching at the university level. His career has taken him across the United States, Europe, and Asia including concerts with the Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra, Ho Chi Minh City Symphony Orchestra, Milano Classica Orchestra da Camera, and National Taiwan Normal University Symphony Orchestra. Other professional conducting engagements include performances with the Abilene Philharmonic, Arkansas Symphony, Austin Symphony, Metropolitan Classical Ballet, East Texas Symphony Orchestra, Texas Chamber Orchestra, and Wichita Falls Symphony Orchestra.

Further highlights include conducting the University of North Texas Symphony Orchestra in concert for an audience of 37,000 at Cowboys Stadium in a major collaboration with the North Texas XLV Super Bowl Host Committee, NFL Films, and Tim McGraw. He has also recorded with the UNT Chamber Orchestra on the Crystal Records label. In addition to his professional schedule, Maestro Couturiaux regularly serves as a guest conductor/clinician, including concerts with several Texas All-Region Honors Orchestras.

In March 2013 the Northeast Louisiana Arts Council named Maestro Couturiaux the recipient of the Edmund Williamson Artist of the Year Award. The award is presented to an artist who the selection committee feels has made the most significant contribution to the improvement of the quality of life for Northeast Louisiana.

Dr. Couturiaux began his musical studies at the age of eight in violoncello and piano. He holds degrees in both conducting and violoncello performance from the University of North Texas. In addition, he developed his conducting skills at the world-renowned Pierre Monteux School for Conductors and Orchestra Musicians in Maine and at the National Arts Centre Conductors Programme in Ottawa, Canada. The long list of distinguished conductors with whom Couturiaux studied includes Anshel Brusilow, Jorma Panula, Michael Jinbo, Hugh Wolff, Neal Gittleman, Carl Topilow, and Harold Farberman.

CONCERT ORCHESTRA

Violin I

Polly Klein ‡
Lucas Furtado
Marlon Barrios
Ella Curb
Alyssa Hall
Jingwei Zhang
Ethan Dunn
Luca Nardelli
Julia Oh
Chloe Svadlenka
Oscar Mata
Isaiah Vargas
Yuma Okada

Violin II

Kelly Huang †
Pablo Cerdas
Mitchelle Cabrera
Evan Collazos
Juliana Jones
Sofia Vega
Seth Castellano
Emma Swank
Valeria Tuesta
Braeden Boyles
Dylan Garcia
Zakkary Diserens
Lance Clark
Josue Tachiquin

Viola

Shanya Chynwat †
John Sharp
Wing Chin Liu
Ke'Juan Thompson
Samuel Yi
Caroline Skeels
Johnathan Ramos
Angel De Hoyos
Kate Durham
Elizabeth Olson
Anthony Brooks
Camryn Bourne

Cello

Louis Staton †
Deohanz Buenafe
Ethan Nelsen
Jin Wang
Noah Sendir
Claire Cabral
Zhimai Ma
Jingyuan Zhang
Maya Huber
Ethen Lim
Ashton Gonzalez

Bass

Savannah Hilterbrandt †
Ruben Borges
Joe Ferris
Zoe Harris
Josue Reyes
Catherine Willis
Camryn Lafargue
Wyatt Gaugler
Kevin Nunez Alejandro

Flute

Summer Bruner
Di Cao *^
Seungbeom Oh #
Carter Reynolds
Michael Salm

Oboe

Madeline Lee *#
Daniel Moreira
Ava Raymond ^

Clarinet

Riley Mazziotta
Kyle Norberg
Allyson Verret #
Wesley Wynn *^

Bassoon

Megan Gober #
Artur Kuchurivskiy
Donovan Neal *^

Horn

Eva Gomez
Caleb Harold
Sebastian Ruiz *^
Samantha Sheats #
Rebecca Yang

Trumpet

Robert Jones
Henry Lesser #
Jacaleb Shepard *^
Joseph Williams

Trombone

Aaron Anderton-Coss
Katie Glading *#^
Thomas Spencer

Tuba

Loghan Runnakko

Timpani

Raina Liao

Percussion

Adam Surak, principal
Desmond Bigler
Brayden Haslam
Jack Spelman
Ezekiel (Zeke) Strawn

Harp

Gabi Logan

‡ Concertmaster

† Principal

* Principal on Rimsky-Korsakov

Principal on Schubert

^ Principal on

Rachmaninoff

UPCOMING EVENT

April 24 – Symphony Orchestra & Grand Chorus – Conductor - Allen Hightower
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): Symphony of Psalms (1930; rev. 1948)
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963): Gloria (1960) with Nereida Garcia, soprano soloist