

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

Stravinsky's Rite of Spring

Gustavo Gimeno, conductor

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

Lili Boulanger

D'un matin de printemps (Of a Spring Morning)

George Gershwin

Piano Concerto in F Major

I. Allegro

II. Adagio – Andante con moto

III. Allegro agitato

Intermission

Igor Stravinsky

Le Sacre du printemps (The Rite of Spring)

(1947 revision)

Part I: The Adoration of the Earth

Part II: The Sacrifice

Program 1

Wednesday,
September 20, 2023

8:00pm

Thursday,
September 21, 2023

8:00pm

Gustavo Gimeno's appearances are generously supported by Susan Brenninkmeyer in memory of Hans Brenninkmeyer.

Jean-Yves Thibaudet's appearance is generously supported by Marianne Oundjian.

The September 20 performance is generously supported by the TSO Board of Directors and the Trustees of the Toronto Symphony Foundation.

The September 21 performance is generously supported by Blake and Belinda Goldring.

Lili Boulanger (1893–1918)

D'un matin de printemps (Of a Spring Morning)

Composed 1917 & 1918

6 min

NADIA BOULANGER STANDS as one of the legendary figures of 20th-century classical music, a French pedagogue who mentored an extraordinary list of famous composers, conductors, and musicians, including Aaron Copland, Philip Glass, Quincy Jones, and Astor Piazzolla. But her sister, Lili, the first woman to win the prestigious Prix de Rome for her cantata, *Faust et Hélène*, fell into near obscurity after her untimely death in 1918 from intestinal tuberculosis at age 24. Her legacy suffered from the paucity of works she wrote in her short life, but also, perhaps more important, a long-standing bias in the compositional world against women.

But as momentum has built in recent years concerning racial and gender equity in the arts, Lili Boulanger's music is coming into its own. Perhaps gaining the most attention is *D'un matin de printemps* (*On a Spring Morning*). She completed it shortly before her death, as a companion or bookend work to *D'un soir triste* (*On a Melancholy Evening*), written earlier the same year, with its contrasting mood and feel. While it would have been difficult to find *D'un matin* on a program as little as five years ago, it is popping up regularly now on orchestral programs worldwide.

That this once-overlooked work, which runs about six minutes, is achieving such new-found popularity is not surprising given its innate appeal. Boulanger originally scored it for several chamber-music combinations, but she created an orchestral version in 1918. The Boulanger sisters fled Paris because of World War I, and this piece was written in the town of Mézy-sur-Seine, about 30 miles

to the northwest, as the Germans were bombarding the French capital. But none of the horrors of war are to be found here, nor hints of Boulanger's declining health.

While dark clouds gather a few times, including a couple of moody violin solos with celeste, they quickly dissipate in this light, airy, and intoxicating piece. *D'un matin* shows obvious influences from Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy with its vivid, inventive orchestration driven by the woodwinds, but Boulanger displays her own distinctive voice. Though not explicitly programmatic like Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony, this work nonetheless offers a vibrant evocation of nature with certain motifs, for example, that can easily be taken as bird calls. It all ends with a boisterous send-off topped by a harp glissando and a final orchestral blast.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan



↑ Marie-Juliette Olga "Lili" Boulanger (right) and her older sister, Nadia, on the eve of WWI. Agence de presse Meurisse (1913): Photographic print from negative on glass plate, Bibliothèque nationale de France

George Gershwin (1898–1937) Piano Concerto in F Major

Composed 1925

29 min

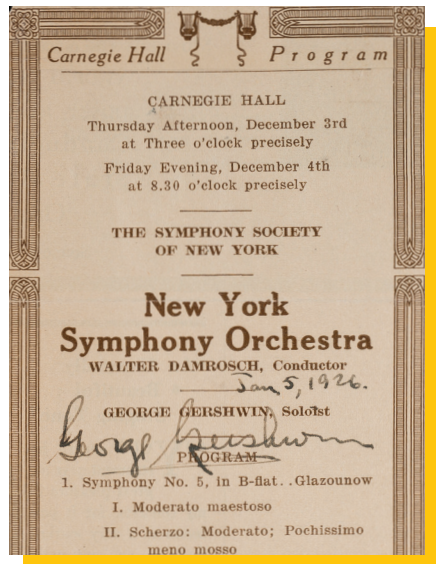
IN THE SPRING OF 1925, Gershwin accepted a commission from the New York Symphony Society to write a piano concerto. His Broadway shows, songs, and *Rhapsody in Blue* had already made him a star, but he had never written for full orchestra. The commission stirred up his chronic insecurities about classical music: he worried that his musical training was inadequate to the task of “serious” composition—though, in fact, he was hardly ignorant of classical music. In any event, he finished the concerto in just four months, and gave the première in December. The critical response was mixed, but audiences loved the piece.

It immediately became known as a “jazz concerto,” which worried Gershwin: he wanted it to be taken seriously, so much so that he had discarded his original title, *New York Concerto*. But jazz and dance music, and Tin Pan Alley songs really are the concerto’s lifeblood. Gershwin knew where his talent lay, and ultimately did not let his insecurities inhibit the free expression of his genius for popular styles. He reinvented the concerto form from the ground up, bending its conventions to suit his personal idiom. He filled the piece with memorable tunes, and drew convincing jazz effects and sonorities from a conventional orchestra, enlarged only by an unusual percussion battery that includes xylophone, bells, snare drum, and “Charleston stick”. The brilliant piano writing captures the vigour, bravado, and improvisatory spirit of Gershwin’s own playing, which was the envy of many classical pianists.

The first movement offers a succession of themes in fashionable popular styles, including Charleston and blues; one major

theme, a long-breathed song tune, appears only in the middle of the long, rhapsodic development section. The slow movement opens with an extended blues, a trumpet singing over slippery, impressionistic harmonies; the piano enters with a faster, jazzy tune, decorated with grace notes and developed at length. A cadenza prepares the real goal of the movement—a big lyrical theme tinged with blue. The finale, a virtuoso showpiece in a loose rondo form, is, in Gershwin’s words, an “orgy of rhythm”; it includes new themes but also reinterprets themes from the first two movements with great ingenuity. There is even a brief outbreak of fugue—the last thing you’d expect to hear in a “jazz concerto.”

—Program note by Kevin Bazzano



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“[Before Gershwin,] various composers [had] been walking around jazz like a cat around a plate of hot soup, waiting for it to cool off, so they could enjoy it without burning their tongues.” —Walter Damrosch

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

Le Sacre du printemps **(*The Rite of Spring*)** **(1947 revision)**

Composed 1911–1913 & 1947

32 min

STRAVINSKY SHOT TO FAME IN 1910, when Les Ballets Russes premièred his dance score *The Firebird*. While composing it, Stravinsky had a vision: “I saw in imagination 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.” Sergei Diaghilev, impresario of the company, sensed the choreographic possibilities in this material and asked Stravinsky to develop them. The composer and scenic designer Nicholas Roerich collaborated on the scenario of *The Rite of Spring*, fleshing out Stravinsky’s original conception and placing it in ancient Slavic times.

Diaghilev entrusted the choreography to Vaslav Nijinsky, one of his company’s most gifted soloists, but an inexperienced dance master. The rehearsals degenerated into little more than frantic exercises in counting, resulting in frayed nerves and explosions of temper. Still, the final runthrough went off without a hint of possible controversy. All that changed at the first performance, which caused what was subsequently described as the most infamous scandal in the history of 20th-century music. Overnight, *The Rite of Spring* transformed perceptions of Stravinsky from talented if dutiful follower of Rimsky-Korsakov and Debussy to the ranks of such “wild men” of music as Bartók and Schönberg.

As early as February 1914, *Rite* received its first concert performance (the music without the ballet) in Saint Petersburg under Serge Koussevitzky. In April that year, after a concert at the Casino de Paris with Pierre Monteux conducting, the composer

was carried in triumph from the hall on the shoulders of his admirers.

In 1921, choreographer Léonide Massine mounted an entirely new stage production for Les Ballets Russes—one that dispensed with prehistoric associations and turned the piece into an abstract ballet. Stravinsky preferred this edition to the original, but it also confirmed in his mind that the music’s true home lies in the concert hall. Commentators have broadly agreed; many of Stravinsky’s subsequent revisions to the music were made with the concert hall rather than the theatre in mind.

Away from the theatre, listeners are free to make whatever associations they wish, or can simply react in a non-specific way to this propulsive, literally earth-shaking score. Its ability to astonish and electrify remains undiminished, more than 100 years after it took the world by storm.

—Program note by Don Anderson



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Often invoked in the *Rite of Spring* 1910 “riot” debate, this cartoon from *Die Zeit* actually depicts Arnold Schönberg conducting a March 31, 1913 Vienna concert at which punches were indeed thrown. Image: Arnold Schönberg Center website



Gustavo Gimeno, conductor

Gustavo Gimeno made his TSO conducting début in February 2018. He was appointed Music Director Designate in November 2019 and made his first appearance as the TSO's tenth Music Director in November 2021. For detailed biography, please see page 8.



Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

Jean-Yves Thibaudet made his TSO début in February 1990.

Through elegant musicality and an insightful approach to contemporary and established repertoire, Jean-Yves Thibaudet has earned a reputation as one of the world's finest pianists. He is especially known for his diverse interests beyond the classical world, including numerous collaborations in film, fashion, and visual art. A recording powerhouse, Thibaudet appears on more than 70 albums and six film soundtracks. He is a devoted educator and the first-ever Artist-in-Residence at the Colburn School, which awards several

scholarships in his name.

Thibaudet appears as soloist in seven compositions this season, performed with 19 orchestras: Gershwin's Concerto in F, Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 5, Khachaturian's Piano Concerto, Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major, Debussy's *Fantaisie*, Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*, and Scriabin's *Prometheus, The Poem of Fire*. In addition to his orchestral dates, Thibaudet joins long-time collaborators Gautier Capuçon and Lisa Batiashvili for a trio tour of the United States. He also continues his multi-season focus on Debussy's *Préludes*, performing both books in recitals throughout Europe. With Michael Feinstein, he continues the acclaimed program *Two Pianos: Who Could Ask for Anything More?* this season, presenting works by Gershwin, Rodgers, and more in new arrangements for piano, voice, and orchestra.

Thibaudet records exclusively for Decca. His most recent solo album, 2021's *Carte Blanche*, features a collection of deeply personal solo piano pieces never before recorded by the pianist. Other highlights from Thibaudet's catalogue include a 2017 recording of Bernstein's "The Age of Anxiety", recordings of the complete solo piano music of Debussy and Satie, and GRAMMY®-nominated recordings of Ravel's complete solo piano works and Saint-Saëns's *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 & 5*. He is the soloist on Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch*; his playing can also be heard in *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, *Wakefield*, and the Oscar-winning and critically acclaimed film *Atonement*. His concert wardrobe is designed by Dame Vivienne Westwood.