

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

**Seong-Jin Cho Returns +
The Poem of Ecstasy**

Gustavo Gimeno, conductor
Seong-Jin Cho, piano

Jimmy López Bellido
Synesthésie

(North American Première)

- I. Toucher
 - II. Odorat
 - III. Goût
 - IV. Audition
 - V. Vision
-

Maurice Ravel
Rapsodie espagnole

- I. Prélude à la nuit
 - II. Malagueña
 - III. Habanera
 - IV. Feria
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Intermission

Maurice Ravel
Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D Major

Alexander Scriabin
Le Poème de l'extase (The Poem of Ecstasy),
Op. 54

Program 2

Thursday,
September 28, 2023
8:00pm

Friday,
September 29, 2023
7:30pm

Saturday,
September 30, 2023
8:00pm

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

Jimmy López Bellido (b. 1978)

Synesthésie

North American Première

Composed 2011

10 min

THE COMPOSER WRITES: Marc-Olivier Dupin, former Music Director of Radio France asked me to write a ten-minute long orchestra piece in five movements for the radio program *Alla Breve*. This program has a preset format: every two-minute movement is aired from Monday to Friday and the whole piece is aired the following Monday. This setup, although extremely interesting, presents many challenges. I usually let musical ideas speak for themselves and this generally results in movements of varying length.

I went on to think about concepts or structures that are made up of five individual, but nevertheless interdependent, parts. This, in turn, led to the realization that our five senses fit perfectly into this category. The only aspect that needed to be addressed was their interdependence. [Most of us] might not be able to completely isolate our senses but we can concentrate on one if we wish to. On the other hand there are those who simply can't avoid the constant interaction of their senses, a condition called Synesthesia.

Synesthetes develop strong neurological associations across their sense organs. A sound may evoke a particular color, or a taste might evoke a geometrical shape. Most people with Synesthesia have only two or three senses involved, but some have developed Synesthesia across all their senses.

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I chose the word “vision” instead of “sight” because it also suggests a state of revelation.

This element of interaction is what makes this work not only a collection of pieces but a single organism.

In *Touch* (drums) I try to depict a range of sensations all the way from numbness to pressure and vibration. In *Smell* (strings) I try to convey floral, pungent, and other types of smells. In *Taste* (woodwinds) I try to portray my own perception of how a sweet or a sour flavor would sound. *Audition* (brass and metal percussions) is a peculiar movement: Here we have sound depicting sound, so, strictly speaking, there are no synesthetic associations going on. My approach here was to create a wide range of auditory sensations in a very compressed span of time, leading us to the fifth and final movement, *Vision* (full orchestra).

I chose the word “vision” instead of “sight” because it also suggests a state of revelation. More than anything, *Synesthésie* is an exercise in imagination—an invitation to enter the world of interconnectedness that a few blessed human beings experience on a daily basis.

Jimmy López Bellido was born in Lima, Peru, in 1978, and has been described as “one of the most interesting young composers anywhere today” (*Chicago Sun-Times*). His works have been performed by leading orchestras around the world. His full-length opera, *Bel Canto*, commissioned by the Lyric Opera of Chicago, premiered in 2015 to wide critical acclaim, and he served as the Houston Symphony’s Composer-in-Residence from 2017 to 2020.

López is published by Filarmonika and Birdsong.



Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Rapsodie espagnole

Composed 1907 & 1908

15 min

THE MUSIC OF SPAIN echoes through Ravel's output. It colours the chamber opera *L'Heure espagnole*, the wordless song *Vocalise-étude en forme de habanera*, the piano piece *Alborada del gracioso*, and the orchestral works *Rapsodie espagnole* and *Boléro*.

How did Ravel come by his "Spanishness," as eminent Spanish composer Manuel de Falla described it? (Falla and Ravel had become good friends during the years Falla spent in Paris.) In part, it came from being born in French Basque Country, close to the Spanish border, to a Spanish-speaking mother. "She spoke fluent Spanish," Falla recalled, "which I enjoyed so much when she evoked the years of her youth, spent in Madrid, an epoch certainly earlier than mine." The immediate antecedents to *Rapsodie espagnole* were two pieces that Ravel adored: fellow Frenchman Emmanuel Chabrier's boisterous rhapsody *España* (1883), and Rimsky-Korsakov's glittering *Capriccio espagnol* (1887).

Both Chabrier and Rimsky-Korsakov make use of traditional folk melodies, however, which Ravel does not. As Falla remarked, "Ravel's 'Hispanization' is not achieved merely by drawing upon popular or 'folk' sources...but much more by the free use of the modal rhythms and melodies and ornamental figures of our 'popular' music, none of which has altered in any way the natural style of the composer."

Rapsodie espagnole is a four-movement dance suite strongly suggestive of various times of day. The opening section, *Prélude à la nuit* (*Prelude to Night*), paints a misty, sensuous portrait of a warm, star-filled night, with muted strings throughout. A brief, scherzo-like example of the *Malagueña*, a

flamenco-style Spanish dance, comes next, inhabiting a world where the sun has risen and the day's activities are beginning.

The third section, *Habanera* (an Afro-Cuban dance form), originated as the first half of the two-piano suite *Sites auriculaires* (1895–1897). It is a largely quiet interlude that moves languorously forward on a slow, sinuous dance rhythm, evoking hazy midday, near siesta time, under intense heat and diamond-bright sunlight. The autograph score of the keyboard version of the piece contains a quote from a Charles Baudelaire poem: "in the perfumed land caressed by the sun."

The concluding section, *Feria*, is the longest and most spectacular of the four. In this riotous portrait of a Spanish folk fair, wrapped around a restrained middle panel that recalls the brooding sultriness of the habaneras of Madrid a generation earlier, Ravel finally unleashes the energy that has remained largely pent-up during the preceding movements.

—Program note by Don Anderson



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The culmination of the TSO's April 9, 2022 Maestros' Special Homecoming concert: Gustavo Gimeno and four former TSO Music Directors passed the baton, one to the next, for a rollicking performance of Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*. Left to right: Gustavo Gimeno, Peter Oundjian, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Sir Andrew Davis, and Günther Herbig. Photo credit: Jag Gundu

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D Major

Composed 1930

19 min

FEW WORKS IN THE CLASSICAL REPERTOIRE have a more fascinating origin story than Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand. It all begins with Paul Wittgenstein, an Austrian-born piano soloist whose right arm was amputated during World War I. Rather than abandon his career, he decided to continue by just playing with his left hand. At first, he performed arrangements and a piece written by his little-known former teacher, Josef Labor. But later, he approached an array of famed composers, including Benjamin Britten, Paul Hindemith, and Sergei Prokofiev, who all agreed to write works for him.

But by far the most famous of these commissions was Ravel's concerto, completed in 1930 toward the end of the composer's life. Wittgenstein, who didn't like the piece at first and even tried to make changes to it, premièred it two years later with the Vienna Symphony. Many pianists with two working hands have performed it since, as Seong-Jin Cho will for these concerts, but it has proved invaluable for later soloists who have lost the use of their right hand. Among the best known of these was celebrated keyboard virtuoso Leon Fleisher, who died in 2020 at 92. Focal dystonia forced him to stop performing with his right hand in 1964, and it was only in 1995, with deep massage and Botox injections, that he was able to return to two-handed repertoire.

This dramatic, fast-changing work, which is performed straight through with no pauses, shows many of the qualities associated with Ravel's music, including rhythmic dynamism, inventive orchestrations,

innovative harmonies, and jazz influences. Perhaps most striking is the skillful way the composer gives the impression of two hands, making use of the entire keyboard and giving the performer a bit of a workout as they shift across the piano bench. "In a work of this kind, it is essential to give the impression of a texture no thinner than that of a part written for both hands," the composer stated.

Of the work's three sections, the most captivating is arguably the propulsive, scherzo-like second, with jazzy, percussive bursts and longer, stylish solos from the piano. Things quiet down for a soulful bassoon theme strongly reminiscent of Ravel's *Boléro*, with iterative pulses in the orchestra and a recurring snare drum along the way providing further echoes of that famed earlier work.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan



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As described by Georg Predota, on first hearing Wittgenstein perform the work, Ravel was infuriated with the liberties the pianist took with the score. Walking slowly towards Wittgenstein, Ravel said "But that's not it at all." Wittgenstein defended himself: "I am a veteran pianist and it doesn't sound well" was the reply. "I am a veteran orchestrator and it does sound well," replied Ravel." Georg Predota, *Interlude*, January 5, 2022

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915)

Le Poème de l'extase (*The Poem of Ecstasy*), Op. 54

Composed 1905–1908

22 min

THE YOUNG SCRIBIN focused his energies on a career as a concert pianist, both inside and outside Russia. He played a great deal of his own music, which at that time was sufficiently traditional—with its echoes of Chopin and Tchaikovsky—to find widespread favour with audiences. Later, he shifted his efforts primarily to composition.

Time and a variety of influences made his music more individual. He developed interests in Liszt, Wagner, and Debussy, for example, three of the great musical radicals of the day. He also embraced philosophical concepts drawn from Eastern religions and nonconformist Russian poetry. He came to think of music as a medium for the expression of his mystical beliefs, as well as a means to bring about the spiritual enlightenment of listeners. He saw himself as a purveyor of universal truth, his goal to prepare humanity, through music, for the upcoming intermingling of humankind and divinity.

These feelings inspired him to compose music of soaring emotion; new, unusual harmonies; and immense instrumental colour. These qualities are conveyed most successfully through the orchestra, a medium to which he came late. All his orchestral scores date from the period of 1895 to 1910. The first two symphonies (1900 and 1901) display recognizable roots in mainstream late-Romantic style. With Symphony No. 3 (1904, subtitled “The Divine Poem”), he made a strong shift toward his mature style.

Two years later, he published a lengthy poem initially titled *Orgiastic Poem*. He later changed the name to *The Poem of Ecstasy*, and declared it the written embodiment

of the orchestral work that he had already begun. The single-movement *Poem* achieved, in a more compact and convincing way than the sprawling, three-movement Symphony No. 3, his goal of channelling cosmic forces.

Poem, in both its written and musical forms, celebrates several types of ecstasy, including the creative and erotic varieties. Opening in quiet contemplation, the musical *Poem* consists of repeated waves of energy. Interludes of relative repose divert each wave from fulfilling the music’s maximum emotional potential. Solo trumpet plays a featured role in leading the way, until finally all uncertainties evaporate in the overwhelming sunburst of the concluding section.

—Program note by Don Anderson



Scriabin's *Orgiastic Poem* was written to accompany the music, though not to be recited with it. The poem tracks the ascent of a spirit into consciousness, illustrated by the gradual shift from third-person “Spirit” to first-person “I”. Here is a brief excerpt:

Je vous appelle à la vie, ô forces mystérieuses!
Noyées dans les obscures profondeurs
De l'esprit créateur, craintives
Ébauches de vie, à vous j'apporte l'audace

I call you to life, oh mysterious forces!
Drowned in the obscure depths
Of the creative spirit, timid
Shadows of life, to you I bring audacity!

Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Poem_of_Ecstasy

For a biography of Gustavo Gimeno, please turn to page 8.



Seong-Jin Cho, piano

Seong-Jin Cho made his TSO début in January 2020.

With an innate musicality and overwhelming talent, Seong-Jin Cho has established himself worldwide as one of the leading pianists of his generation and most distinctive artists on the current music scene. His thoughtful and poetic, assertive and tender, virtuosic, and colourful playing can combine panache with purity and is driven by an impressive natural sense of balance.

In 2015, Cho was brought to the world's attention when he won First Prize at the Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw.

Since then, his career has been on a rapid ascent. In January 2016, he signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon. An artist in high demand, Cho frequently works with prestigious orchestras including Berliner Philharmoniker, Wiener Philharmoniker, and London Symphony Orchestra, among others. Conductors he regularly collaborates with include Myung-Whun Chung, Gustavo Dudamel, Andris Nelsons, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Gianandrea Noseda, Sir Simon Rattle, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Lahav Shani.

In the 2023/24 season, Cho's highlights include his highly anticipated début at the Salzburger Festspiele, performing with Mozarteumorchester and Ivor Bolton. He is also set to return to London's BBC Proms with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Santtu-Matias Rouvali. Cho's extensive touring includes performances with the Berliner Philharmoniker and Kirill Petrenko in Korea, and with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Andris Nelsons in Korea and Japan. Moreover, he is slated to perform with Washington, DC's National Symphony Orchestra and Gianandrea Noseda throughout Europe. He notably returns to the Concertgebouworkest, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony Orchestra, giving performances in both Boston and Carnegie Hall, and makes anticipated débuts with The Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

As a sought-after recitalist, Cho graces prestigious concert halls worldwide, including Carnegie Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and Berliner Philharmonie. He has released several albums, including *The Handel Project* in February 2023, Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 and Scherzi in August 2021, and *The Wanderer* in May 2020. All his albums, released on the Yellow Label, have received critical acclaim.

Born in 1994 in Seoul, Seong-Jin Cho began learning the piano at age 6, and, by 11, he gave his first public recital. His exceptional talent led him to become the youngest-ever winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition in 2009 and win Third Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the age of 17. From 2012 to 2015, he studied with Michel Béroff at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris. Currently based in Berlin, Cho continues to enthrall audiences worldwide with his exceptional artistry.

Cho records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon. More information on Seong-Jin Cho can be found at seongjin-cho.com.