# PROGRAM NOTES

# MISSOULA SYMPHONY CONCERTS

# SEPTEMBER 24 & 25, 2011

**Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

**Hungarian Rhapsody No.2**

*Recommended Recording: Ivan Fischer, Budapest Festival Orchestra*

Although Franz Liszt enjoyed a cosmopolitan upbringing and international fame, he never forgot his Hungarian roots. He remained intensely devoted to the country of his birth throughout his life; however, one suspects that he, having grown up in Vienna and Paris speaking German and

French, was a Hungarian more by enthusiasm than ethnic heritage.

Liszt made several visits to his homeland where he indulged himself in the study of Hungarian ethnomusicology. He even went so far as to visit several gypsy encampments where he absorbed the rhythmic intricacies of the songs and dances of these fascinating people and collected many of their tunes. The end result was one of his several literary endeavors - a long book entitled *The Gypsies and their Music in Hungary*, which he published in 1859. Unfortunately, Liszt, though well intentioned, was entirely wrong in attributing gypsy origins to Hungarian music. As Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were to discover half a century later, Hungarian music was actually a peasant phenomenon; the gypsies merely

contributed a unique inflection, distinctive style of playing, and characteristic instrumentation to previously existing folk materials.

In great nationalistic fervor, Liszt wrote 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies for piano during his lifetime. In them, Liszt captured the distinctive sounds of the gypsy band with its sentimental solo violin, string choirs, shrieking winds, and delicate percussive sounds of the cimbalom. Like the Second Rhapsody, most are two-part structures inspired by the Czardas, a fiery Hungarian dance. It begins with a slow section and ends with a fast section. Equally impressive is the range of emotion that it covers – a characteristic that has helped keep the work among the most popular in orchestral repertoire to this day. The work was transcribed for orchestra by Karl Müller-Berghaus.

**Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908)**

***Zigeunerweisen* (Gypsy Airs) op.20**

**Carmen Fantasy, op.25**

*Recommended Recording: Itzhak Perlman and Zubin Mehta, New York Philharmonic*

Pablo de Sarasate established himself as a violin virtuoso while in his twenties, giving concerts on all the great stages of Europe and North and South America. At the peak of his career he was greatly admired by audiences and fellow musicians alike, and particularly by composers. Important composers of his day wrote for him and dedicated their works to him. Saint-Saëns, one of these admiring composers, dedicated two of his three violin concertos to

Sarasate, as well as his “Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso.”

Spanish by birth and French by training, he was born in Pamplona in 1844 to a humble and musical family. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire and became thoroughly attached to Paris, and to France, for the rest of his life. Adding to his Spanish and French heritage, one can perhaps relate his temperament to those stereotypical characteristics of a Gypsy – nomadic, dark-tempered, impulsive, passionate, and improvisational.

The Gypsy melodies used in *Zigeunerweisen* are not the flamenco melodies of Sarasate's native Spain, but rather those of the Hungarian Gypsies which he encountered on his extended concert tours. The work consists of a cadenza-

like introduction followed by a pair of very popular dance melodies (slow and fast) just like the familiar pattern from Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No.2 (Sarasate met Liszt in Budapest during the 1870s). The work allowed Sarasate to showcase his formidable technique - it is peppered with double stops, harmonics, left hand pizzicati and virtuosic spiccato bowing.

The Carmen Fantasy was written five years later, inspired by the popularity of Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen*. It tells the story of Carmen – the sexy gypsy heroine who is free with her love and known for her fiery temper. These qualities along with the exotic Spanish flavored music inspired Sarasate and he composed a work that contains adaptations of the Aragonaise, Habanera, the Interlude, Seguidilla and the Gypsy Dance.

While the work abounds in technical challenges throughout, the character of the music ranges from tender and lyrical to intense and passionate. Because of the combination of technique and artistry it demands, the work is often required for violin competitions.

**Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

**Symphonic Poem No.3 – *Les Préludes***

*Recommended Recording: Herbert von Karajan, Berlin Philharmonic*

*Les Préludes* (Symphonic Poem No.3) is the best known and most popular of Liszt's symphonic poems and was premiered in 1854. The concept of the symphonic poem was Liszt's invention – he wanted to create a musical form

that was driven by poetic and literary ideas as opposed to purely musical considerations and traditions. *Les Préludes* is a colorful, dramatic work that was originally written in 1848 as a prelude to a choral work (The Four Elements). It was revised several times in succeeding years, until it reached its final form in 1854 as an independent orchestral work.

Although Liszt used some of the thematic material of The Four Elements, he related the final version to the poem Les Préludes from Lamartine's Méditations Poétiques (Poetic Meditations): "…what is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown song whose first solemn note is sounded only by death? Love is the glowing dawn of all existence; but what is the fate where the first delights of happiness are not interrupted by some storm…"

Liszt depicts man's struggle for existence through various interconnected episodes: first, love ("The Enchanted Daybreak"), then the harshness of the real world ("Storms Whose Killing Breath Dispel Lovely Illusion"), a pastoral interlude ("A Pleasant Rest Amidst Nature's Moods"), a call to battle ("The Trumpets' Loud Clangor…The Post of Danger…"), and finally, self-recognition.

**Zoltan Kodály (1882-1967)**

**Háry János Suite**

*Recommended Recording: Georg Solti, Chicago Symphony Orchestra*

The Hungarian Zoltan Kodály was a man of many interests. In addition to composing, he was a professor and then

assistant director at the Budapest Academy of Music. He was a music critic for newspapers and journals in Hungary and the author of numerous scholarly writings on central European folk music. And he was an internationally recognized music educator, the father of the "Kodály method" for developing musical literacy in schoolchildren.

Perhaps most important, he was a leading ethnomusicologist, working with Béla Bartók to free Hungarian folk music from the gypsy encrustations heard in European cafes. Over a 10-year period, starting in 1905, Kodály and Bartók spent their summers touring Hungarian villages and recording folk songs on wax cylinders or jotting them down in notation as the villagers sang them. This pioneer effort resulted in a series of folk-song collections and studies, which are classics in their field.

In his composing Kodály, like Bartók, was committed to furthering the musical heritage of his country, drawing his subjects from Hungarian literature and folklore and seasoning his music with the pungent vigor of Hungarian peasant idioms. In that regard, Bartók paid his friend the highest praise: "If I were asked," he wrote, "in whose music the spirit of Hungary is most perfectly embodied, I would reply, in Kodály's. His music is a profession of faith in the spirit of Hungary. His work as a composer is entirely rooted in the soil of Hungarian folk music." But, unlike Bartók, Kodály wrote mainly in a late romantic style, conservative in its harmonic language and easily accessible to modern audiences. Several of his nationalist compositions have won a permanent place in the international repertoire.

His most popular work, *Háry János*, more of a popular tale than a true opera, was first performed in the Hungarian capital in 1926. It centers on the exploits, largely imaginary, of the soldier Háry János, an inveterate liar, who sits in the tavern, telling anyone who will listen to him of his famous adventures, escapades that include the personal defeat of the French Emperor Napoleon, a love affair with the Empress Marie-Louise, the shifting of the frontier single-handed, and, of course, the receipt of lavish honors bestowed upon him by a grateful Emperor.

The **Prelude** begins with an orchestral imitation of a sneeze. This comes from the old Hungarian belief that a story told after a sneeze is always true. Following the sneeze, the basses and celli emit slow, almost somber tones,

finally emerging into a melancholic melodic theme. **The Viennese Musical Clock** is a depiction of Háry János at the Austrian court, where he hears the clocks strike at midday**. The Song** starts with a solo viola, joined by the cimbalom. The music has a light and airy feel and much of the music from this movement is supplied primarily from the Hungarian folk song "This Side the Tisza, Beyond the Danube." **The Battle and Defeat of Napoleon** is a satirical parody on France's national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, and tells the story of how Háry János single-handedly defeats Napoleon and his men. The **Intermezzo** is a *Verbunkos*, an 18th-century Hungarian military recruiting dance. The movement's primary theme is from a piano method written by Istvan Gati in 1802. The cimbalom resurfaces to create a folk-like atmosphere. Finally, **The Entrance of the Emperor and His Court** depicts the Imperial court as seen

through the eyes of a peasant. Starting off the movement, the woodwinds mimic the high-pitched banter of the courtiers. Kodály brings back the parody of the *Marseillaise* for a grand finish.

- *Darko Butorac*