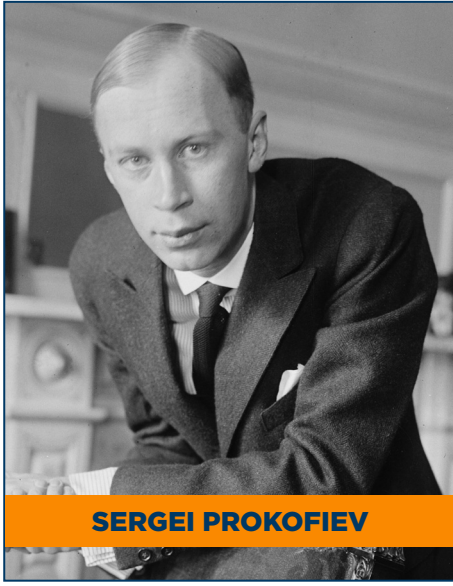


# PETER & THE WOLF *program notes*



**SERGEI PROKOFIEV**

## **Peter and the Wolf** **Sergei Prokofiev**

By the mid-1930s, the Soviet composer Sergei Prokofiev was already a notorious composer, generally respected among artists but not altogether celebrated (or even trusted) by the increasingly oppressive regime of Soviet leader Josef Stalin. A former child prodigy at the piano, Prokofiev's brilliance was unquestioned. However, his original music, which often incorporated harsh dissonance and unusual structures, had at times pushed up against — or beyond — the prescribed standards of Soviet tastemakers. This tension dated back at least to 1915, when a Moscow critic published a scathing review of the composer's *Scythian Suite* — despite the fact that the performance had been cancelled and the composer remained in possession of the score's only copy.

Likely, his international reputation protected him to a degree. Where other artists were being censored (or much worse: in 1940, the premiere of an opera by Prokofiev was postponed because Stalin's secret police had arrested and shot the director), Prokofiev — who had been allowed to live abroad and whose symphonies and piano concertos were known widely across the western world — navigated the politics of the time in such a way that he could continue composing mostly what he chose.

In 1935, Prokofiev, his wife and children attended a performance at the Moscow Children's Theatre of a fanciful opera titled *The Tale of the Fisherman and*

*the Goldfish*. The family so enjoyed the performance that they quickly became regulars at the theatre. Spotting an opportunity, the theatre's director, Natalia Satz, suggested to Prokofiev that he compose a piece of music for children that told a story while also introducing the audience to different instruments. Satz pointed out that such a work could be an important addition to the musical and educational repertoire.

The composer took the suggestion to heart and began work. He initially teamed up with a poet but was not pleased with her work and decided to write his own story and narration. Once occupied, the composer only took a few days to turn out the piece we now know as *Peter and the Wolf*. It is, today, Prokofiev's most widely and oft-performed composition.

The story of *Peter and the Wolf* is relatively straightforward as told by the narrator; the brilliance of the work comes in its characterful depictions of the various animal and human characters, and the masterful way that their interactions interweave various musical elements. There is the titular boy, Peter, whose nuanced personality is told by the strings. The wolf, ominous and strong, is depicted by three horns. Other characters include Peter's grandfather (bassoon), Peter's cat (clarinet), a bird (flute), a duck (oboe) and some hunters (timpani and bass drum). It all makes for a vivid fantasy that feels at times like a film score yet ultimately needs no visuals to convey the colorful story.

## **Carnival of the Animals** **Camille Saint-Saëns**

Perhaps only in Mozart can we find a precocious talent equal to Camille Saint-Saëns. By age two, Saint-Saëns was playing the piano and demonstrating absolute pitch. By age three, he was writing and reading music; by five, he was reading opera scores and Beethoven sonatas. His first solo recital, given at the tender age of ten, presented challenges rarely taken up by musicians twice his age: a Mozart concerto, a Beethoven concerto, a Prelude and Fugue by Bach, and four other works...all performed *from memory*. At that concert, Saint-Saëns' mother was asked, "What kind of music will he be playing when he's twenty?" To which she replied, "He will

be playing his own!"

Good call. By age twenty, Camille Saint-Saëns had already composed symphonies as well as numerous other smaller-scale works. "I live in music like a fish lives in water," Saint-Saëns famously said.

To find out more about how a fish lives in water, one need only look to Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, a collection of musical animal-portraits written in 1886. These portraits range from the comical — including an elephant who playfully obliterates themes from Berlioz's "Dance of the Sylphs" — to the impressionistic: the music of "The Aquarium" dazzles with its drifting fluidity and combination of sparkle and mystery.

Saint-Saëns wrote these fourteen movements during a period of personal frustration, during which he canceled a number of performance engagements. Yet this period apparently inspired the composer, who concurrently produced his justly famous Third ("Organ") Symphony (which we will hear later this season). That large-scale symphony and this series of musical miniatures could hardly seem more different on the surface; yet the two works have lived on as the composer's two most celebrated orchestral compositions.

## **Harry Potter Symphonic Suite** **John Williams**

Few modern composers have achieved the level of name recognition that is enjoyed by John Williams. Composer of scores to such popular films as *Jaws*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Star Wars*, and *E.T.*, Williams has managed to bring modern classical music to the ears — and record shelves — of many American families who have never even heard of Gustav Holst or Gustav Mahler (two composers whose music has significantly influenced Williams).

Born in New York in 1932, John Williams studied piano from a young age. After serving time in the Air Force in the early 1950s, Williams attended the prestigious Juilliard School in New York, where he studied piano and also played jazz in clubs around the city. He eventually moved to Los Angeles where he began working as a session musician; his reputation as an arranger and composer

# JOHN JOHNSON *narrator*



John Johnson is no stranger to the Philharmonic stage, having appeared as a featured actor in any number of concerts. However, his true claim to fame is as the voice that reminds you to silence your cell phones and unwrap your lozenges before Philharmonic concerts at North Auditorium, where he has been the Auditorium Director for 23 years.

He attended DePauw University, majoring in English Literature and Communication Arts and Sciences. As a performer, he has also appeared with the Mill Race Theatre Company, Dancer's Studio and Carmel Symphony Orchestra. He has been the Drama Coach at Columbus North for 26 years. He has directed 117 plays and musicals.

In his spare time, you can find him running the roads and trails all over the country (he's well on his way to completing a major run in each of the 50 states) or experimenting in the kitchen or over the grill. He owes all that he is and does to his wife, Juli, and his daughter, Lily. Cooking, running and theatre are nice, but family is everything.

began to grow, and by the early 1970s Williams had become the composer of choice for many of Hollywood's biggest filmmakers. He composed the score for Alfred Hitchcock's film, *Family Plot*, as well as scores for many of the popular 'disaster' movies of that decade, including *The Poseidon Adventure*, *The Towering Inferno*, and *Earthquake*.

Even at the time, though, it was likely hard to imagine the level of success he would eventually achieve. Over his illustrious career Williams has earned 25 Grammy Awards and five Academy Awards. His 52 Academy Award nominations are second only to Walt Disney.

and casts a spell that causes a broom to do his dirty work for him?

But unlike the other animated stories in *Fantasia*, that sequence was actually true to the story envisioned by the music's composer. (Well, minus the mouse.)

Fans of the *Harry Potter* movies will instantly recognize the themes featured in the Symphonic Suite on this concert. Chief among them is "Hedwig's Theme," a mysterious tune that often shows up played by ethereal bells but that also permeates other music throughout the films. Williams is a master at thematic development. As anyone familiar with the *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* franchises will know, Williams uses these themes in highly narrative ways to help support and give nuance to the plot development and underlying emotions of what's happening on-screen. One also hears, in this Suite, the progression in the films from magical innocence to menace to ultimate triumph and redemption. As such, even those scant few people who have never seen a *Harry Potter* film can enjoy Williams' music as pure, exciting entertainment.

The French composer Paul Dukas was a strong proponent of the symphonic poem form. In 1897, Dukas found inspiration in a poem from exactly a century earlier by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe titled "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." The poem tells of an apprentice to a wizard who, left alone to do chores in the workshop, animates a broom to fetch water for him. But the broom won't stop fetching water, and soon creates a flood in the workshop. The boy splits the broom in half with an axe — but then both halves of the broom begin fetching water, speeding the deluge. Finally, the sorcerer returns and casts the spell that halts the mayhem. The boy, needless to say, is duly chastised. Sound familiar?

If the story does, the music surely will as well. It helps that the melody that Dukas chose as the primary refrain of his piece is so deliciously playful and mischievous, yet simple and instantly memorable — played by four (!!) bassoons all together. Add to that the exciting colors that were a hallmark of the Frenchman's compositional style, and you get a simply fantastic miniature, and a musical fantasy worthy of the silver screen as well as the concert hall.

### **The Sorcerer's Apprentice** **Paul Dukas**

*The Sorcerer's Apprentice* was already a well-known concert piece before Mickey Mouse came along and made it one of the most beloved and familiar short works for orchestra. Who can forget the sequence in Disney's *Fantasia* when Mickey dons the old wizard's hat

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