

## PROGRAM NOTE by ERIC BROMBERGER

### **Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, FS119**

CARL NIELSEN

Born June 9, 1865, Norre-Lyndelse

Died October 2, 1931, Copenhagen

Nielsen supported himself and his family for many years as a violinist, but he had an unusually close relationship with wind instruments throughout his life. As a boy of fourteen, he played trumpet, signal horn, and trombone in a military band, and late in life he wrote a number of works for wind instruments. After hearing the Copenhagen Wind Quintet play Mozart in 1921, Nielsen became good friends with the members of that ensemble. He wrote a *Wind Quintet* for them in 1922, then decided to write a concerto for each of the Quintet's members. Nielsen completed a *Flute Concerto* (1926) and a *Clarinet Concerto* (1928), but his death at 66 of heart disease robbed us of the planned concertos for oboe, bassoon, and French horn.

Nielsen felt that every separate instrument had its own unique character, and he once remarked that "each instrument is like a person who sleeps, whom I have to wake to life." It has been suggested that the *Flute Concerto* takes its character from the flutist for whom it was written, Holger Gilbert Jespersen. Jespersen has been described as "elegant" and "Gallic," and some have been quick to hear these qualities in the concerto written for him, but Nielsen was probably writing for the instrument rather than for a specific performer. He said of the flute: "It is at home in Arcadia and prefers pastoral moods. A composer must fit in with its gentle nature if he doesn't want to be branded as a barbarian." Nielsen's *Flute Concerto*—in two movements that last only about 17 minutes—is often "pastoral" in mood, but it is also a quirky, original, charming (and very funny) piece of music.

Nielsen wrote this concerto while on vacation in Italy in the fall of 1926 (the manuscript is dated October 1 in Florence), and Jespersen was soloist at the first performance, which took place as part of an all-Nielsen concert in Paris three weeks later. That concert was a huge success (Ravel and Honegger were in the audience, and Nielsen was awarded the Legion of Honor the following day), but Nielsen was not fully satisfied with the concerto. He re-wrote its ending, and Jespersen was again the soloist when this final version was premiered in Oslo on November 9, 1926. That change, as we shall see, was crucial to giving this music its special flavor.

The *Allegro moderato* springs to life with a fierce gesture from the orchestra, but this will prove to be a false direction, quickly corralled by the flute's more civilized entrance, and the movement settles down for what seems at first a normal exposition. This is based on two ideas: a dancing, staccato theme announced by the solo flute and a more flowing melody marked *dolce*, introduced by the orchestra and taken up by the flute. The development begins, and at this point an unexpected guest shows up: the concerto's "other" principal player, a bass trombone, intrudes and becomes the rival of the solo flute. The trombone functions in this concerto much like a pesky neighbor who feels free to lean over the fence and comment on everything going on in your backyard. Here, over pounding timpani, it makes a rude entrance, going on at length while the flute scurries about in dismay. And then the development resumes as if nothing had happened. At this point Nielsen introduces the movement's third theme, an absolutely lovely idea that is sung glowingly by the flute. Nielsen offers his soloist an impressive cadenza, accompanied first by timpani and then joined by a saucy solo clarinet. The orchestra returns, the movement's themes are reviewed briefly (it is altogether typical of this concerto that a new one should show up in the closing measures), and gradually the soloist leads the orchestra to a calm close in G-flat major.

The *Allegretto* begins violently with harmonically unstable attacks from the orchestra, and once again the solo flute restores order with its dancing entrance, marked *grazioso* and set in unambiguous G major. A brief *Adagio ma non troppo* recalls the theme introduced in the closing moments of the first movement; this rises to a rather strident climax before the *Allegretto* resumes. And from here on, things really take some surprising turns. At the coda, marked *Tempo di marcia*, Nielsen re-bars the movement's main theme in 6/8, something Mozart would do occasionally. At the Paris premiere, the concerto marched home calmly in D major, but after hearing that performance, Nielsen rethought the ending and produced a new one for the Oslo premiere, more in keeping with the concerto's wry sense humor. Our old friend the trombone shows up again and apparently has had a few drinks while he was gone—now he takes over the *Tempo di marcia* theme for himself, then insists on singing the flute's lovely third theme from the first movement. However rude it may be, the trombone also knows what it's doing—its sleazy glissandos now nudge the concerto toward the "correct" key of E major, and finally the concerto dances to its wonderful close: the flute tries desperately to maintain its elegant bearing, but it is the tipsy trombone that gets the last word.

## **Biennale Snapshot**

VIVIAN FUNG

Born February 6, 1975, Edmonton, Alberta

JUNO Award-winning composer Vivian Fung has a talent for combining idiosyncratic textures and styles into large-scale works, often assimilating influences such as non-Western folk music, Tibetan chant, and Brazilian rhythms. Fung has enjoyed numerous high-profile projects in recent years as her music continues to move in new directions. Her Violin Concerto No. 2 was commissioned and premiered in February 2015 by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra with Jonathan Crow, violin. Most recently, her *Biennale Snapshots* opened the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's 2015-16 season alongside Beethoven's Violin Concerto. The 25-minute work, commissioned by the Vancouver Biennale and inspired by five artworks from the Biennale exhibition, garnered much attention: "If [violinist] Miriam Fried was what everyone was talking about when they arrived at the concert ... Vivian Fung was all they talked about when they left" (*Georgia Straight*, Sept. 28, 2015).

***The Following Program Note has been supplied by the Composer.***

(italicized paragraphs are courtesy of the Vancouver Biennale)

Biennale Snapshots celebrates the Vancouver Biennale's 2014 – 2016 Open Air Museum installations and is the first musical composition to be commissioned by the Biennale. The twenty-five-minute work is set in five movements, the first and second of which are played without pause. I chose to pay homage to the Biennale by selecting five different artworks from the exhibition and having each movement be my musical "snapshot" of the visual piece, allowing the visual to inspire the aural.

1) The work starts with "Breath Song," inspired by Sumakshi Singh's work, originally described as a "symphony of 108 breath sounds." I have taken just a few of the breath phrases and magnified them for orchestra, so that the entire movement comprises whispers, breathing into certain instruments, and other ambient sounds reflecting the ephemeral nature of the original.

*BREATH SONG, created by Vancouver Biennale 2014 Residency Artist Sumakshi Singh from New Delhi, India, was a performative work composed of a symphony of 108 breath sounds*

*specific to and recorded in Squamish, British Columbia, and accompanied by a video projected on a transparent screen placed in nature. The video displayed words related to breath (chosen by 108 participants) created from the condensation of their breath vapours on glass and appearing in a poetic sequence. In this work, Singh explored breath as a subtle border, a transparent veil moving between the physical and astral world, the thread tying the spirit to the body. Bringing together 108 breaths, BREATH SONG created a borderless space where one could experience existential unity.*

2) “Breath Song” leads directly into “Tree,” inspired by The Blue Trees of Konstantin Dimopoulos. “Tree” starts off quietly and gently but gradually builds into large waves of sounds that weave in and out of each other. The second half of the movement grows more violent, reflecting the urgency of Dimopoulos’s mission to bring awareness of global deforestation through his artwork.

*THE BLUE TREES, by Australian artist Konstantin Dimopoulos, is a global environmental art project launched during the 2009 – 2011 Vancouver Biennale in three local cities – Richmond, West Vancouver, and Port Moody. Subsequently, the artist has expanded this project to eleven cities internationally. THE BLUE TREES is an example of a local initiative gone global, an example of how art can be a catalyst for learning and community engagement. THE BLUE TREES transforms the familiar urban landscape into something surreal or unfamiliar. The intentional transformation of the everyday stimulates dialogue and raises our environmental consciousness by highlighting trees and their importance as lungs of the Earth. In 2015, THE BLUE TREES installation will be created in New Westminster, Squamish, and at the launch of Simons West Coast flagship department store in West Vancouver.*

3) The third movement, “Graffiti Mashup,” pays homage to OSGEMEOS’s Giants. The movement is a mashup of different musical elements that underlie the colorful street art – quotations of two Brazilian Tropicalia songs, references to hip-hop beats and licks; in general, a rhythmically robust movement. This music is loud, in-your-face, and chaotic – like a hip-hop version of Charles Ives – with elements gradually colliding with each other into a wonderful mess, creating a crazy club-like atmosphere for the orchestra.

*GIANTS is the largest and first 360-degree mural created by the internationally renowned Brazilian street artists OSGEMEOS. The brightly coloured seventy-foot-tall mural has transformed the six industrial silos at the Ocean Concrete plant on Granville Island and has quickly become one of the iconic landmarks in a city skyline filled with glass and concrete architecture. The mural has become a focal point for the over ten million annual visitors to Granville Island and is now an undeniable icon of the city.*

4) The fourth movement, labeled “Interludium: Water Rising,” is a short movement that

reflects the undulating waves and curves of Ren Jun's Water #10 sculpture. The beginning is orchestrated to simulate waves flowing in and out, gradually building into lush chords for the entire orchestra. The sound then ascends, all in one gesture from the very bottom to the top, in one big current that ends with the arrival of water gongs.

*WATER #10 is a 16-meter-tall stainless-steel sculpture by the Chinese artist Ren Jun. The inspiration for this artwork comes from pure forms: liquid water or mercury stopped in motion that reveals its shape as a drop or spill caught in the air. Despite its 2100-kg weight this work has no angles or hard edges, resulting in a free-flowing form, a manifestation of light and fluidity. This artwork was exhibited during the 2009 – 2011 Vancouver Biennale in Richmond, British Columbia and subsequently has become a permanent Legacy Artwork through a private donation.*

5) The last movement, "Grass," reveals the defiant nature of Ai Weiwei's F Grass. It features loud low bass pedal tones in the brass, counteracted by high, nasal woodwinds. A militaristic fanfare atmosphere is complemented by fast virtuosic passages for strings and woodwinds, releasing the also fleeting and whimsical nature of Ai Weiwei's work. All elements collide at the end, creating a triumphant close to the piece.

*Ai Weiwei is one of the leading artists and cultural figures of our time and consistently displays great courage in placing himself at risk to effect social change through his art. F GRASS is a site-specific installation created for the 2014 – 2016 Vancouver Biennale. The 1,328 interconnected "grass" pieces symbolize the collective and indestructible strength and resilience of ordinary individuals whose unified mass challenges censorship and oppression in China. Inspired by the organic form and fragile beauty of grass, Ai Weiwei created F GRASS using cast iron, an industrial material that will be transformed via exposure to nature throughout all seasons.*

*The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that celebrates art in public spaces, creating a catalyst for learning, community engagement, and social action. The 2014 – 2016 Vancouver Biennale features diverse works by established and breakthrough international artists in keeping with the exhibition theme Open Borders / Crossroads Vancouver. For more information about the artworks represented in Biennale Snapshots, visit [www.vancouverbiennale.com/artworks](http://www.vancouverbiennale.com/artworks).*

### **Pictures at an Exhibition (orchestrated by Maurice Ravel)**

**MODEST MUSSORGSKY**

Born March 21, 1839, Karevo

Died March 28, 1881, St. Petersburg

In the summer of 1873, Modest Mussorgsky was stunned by the sudden death of his

friend Victor Hartmann, an architect and artist who was then only 39. The following year, their mutual friend Vladimir Stasov arranged a showing of over 400 of Hartmann's watercolors, sketches, drawings, and designs. Inspired by the exhibition and the memory of his friend, Mussorgsky set to work on a suite of piano pieces based on the pictures and wrote enthusiastically to Stasov: "Hartmann is bubbling over, just as *Boris* did. Ideas, melodies, come to me of their own accord, like the roast pigeons in the story—I gorge and gorge and overeat myself. I can hardly manage to put it all down on paper fast enough." He worked fast indeed: beginning on June 2, 1874, Mussorgsky had the score complete three weeks later, on June 22, just a few months after the premiere of *Boris Godunov*.

The finished work, which he called *Pictures at an Exhibition*, consists of ten musical portraits bound together by a promenade theme that recurs periodically—Mussorgsky said that this theme, meant to depict the gallery-goer strolling between paintings, was a portrait of himself. Curiously, *Pictures* spent its first half-century in obscurity. It was not performed publicly during Mussorgsky's lifetime, it was not published until 1886 (five years after its composer's death), and it did not really enter the standard piano repertory until several decades after that: the earliest recording of the piano version did not take place until 1942. Even early listeners were struck by the "orchestral" sonorities of this piano score, and in 1922 conductor Serge Koussevitzky asked Maurice Ravel to orchestrate it. Koussevitzky gave the first performance of Ravel's version at the Paris Opera on October 19, 1922, and that quickly became one of the most popular works in the orchestral repertory.

The opening *Promenade* alternates 5/4 and 6/4 meters; Mussorgsky marks it "in the Russian manner," and Ravel assigns the famous opening to the solo trumpet, quickly joined by the full brass section. *The Gnome* is a portrait of a gnome staggering on twisted legs; the following *Promenade* is marked "with delicacy." In Hartmann's watercolor *The Old Castle*, a minstrel sings before a ruined castle. Ravel makes a daring (and very effective) choice by assigning his song to a solo saxophone, whose mournful sound feels exactly right in this context. *Tuileries* is a watercolor of children playing and quarreling in the Paris park; Ravel portrays them with chattering woodwinds. *Bydlo* returns to Eastern Europe, where a heavy ox-cart grinds through the mud. The wheels pound ominously along as the driver sings, and Ravel assigns his song to the tuba. The music rises to a strident climax as the cart draws near and passes, then diminishes as the cart moves on. Mussorgsky wanted the following *Promenade* to sound

*tranquillo*, and Ravel begins with the clear sound of high flutes, but gradually this *Promenade* takes on unexpected power. *The Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks* depicts Hartmann's costume design for the ballet *Trilby*, in which these characters wore egg-shaped armor—Ravel captures the sound of the chicks with chirping grace notes in the woodwinds.

“I meant to get Hartmann's Jews,” said Mussorgsky of *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle*, a portrait of two Jews—one rich and one poor—in animated conversation. Ravel gives each of them a particular sound: the rich voice of Goldenberg is heard in the strings, while Schmuyle's rapid, high voice is depicted by a trumpet solo, one of the most famous ever composed for that instrument. *The Marketplace at Limoges* shows Frenchwomen quarreling furiously in a market, while *Catacombs* is Hartmann's portrait of himself surveying the Roman catacombs by lantern light; Ravel makes effective use of deep brass and woodwinds here. This section leads into *Cum mortuis in lingua mortua*: “With the dead in a dead language.” Mussorgsky noted of this section: “The spirit of the departed Hartmann leads me to the skulls and invokes them: the skulls begin to glow faintly”; embedded in this spooky passage is a minor-key variation of the *Promenade* theme. *The Hut on Fowl's Legs* shows the hut (perched on hen's legs) of the vicious witch Baba Yaga, who would fly through the skies in a red-hot mortar. Ravel's version depicts her with slashing attacks for full orchestra. Mussorgsky has her fly scorchingly right into the final movement, *The Great Gate of Kiev*. Hartmann had designed a gate (never built) for the city of Kiev, and Mussorgsky's brilliant finale transforms the genial *Promenade* theme into a heaven-storming conclusion. Ravel gives the first statement to a noble brass choir, then gradually builds to one of the most exciting orchestral sounds ever created, full of ringing bells and massed attacks.

A NOTE ON THE RAVEL ORCHESTRATION: So famous has Ravel's orchestration become that it is regarded as a virtual treatise on orchestration all by itself, yet some observers have had doubts about it, and listeners may be surprised to learn that there are at least ten other orchestral versions by such varied names as Mikhail Tuschmaloff, Sir Henry Wood, Leo Funtek, Leopold Stokowski, Serge Gortchakoff, and others. Pianist-conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy, who has prepared a version of his own, makes an interesting point: effective as Ravel's orchestration is, it gives this essentially Russian music a distinctly “French” sound—light, bright, and brilliant. Ashkenazy set out to restore a “Russian” sound to *Pictures*, and his version is much darker and heavier, making the music sound unexpectedly somber. Ashkenazy has a point, but it is difficult

to separate this music from Ravel's superb orchestration, which is a creative act fully worthy of Mussorgsky's original score.